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STANLEY BRERETON

BY

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AUTHOR OF

"THE TOWER OF LONDON."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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STANLEY BRERETON.

THE SHORES OF THE MEDITERRANEAN.

I.

SISTER ALINE'S TESTIMONY IN FAVOUR OF MILDRED.

NEXT morning Mrs. Brereton, accompanied by Rose, came over to Beaucliffe.

They were received by Stanley, who conducted the younger lady to the drawing-room, at the door of which he left her, and then took his mother to the library, where they found Mr. Warburton writing letters.

On the entrance of Mrs. Brereton he immediately desisted from his task and welcomed her as heartily as ever; but it was evident from her looks and manner that the lady was deeply displeased both with him and her son.

"You don't seem quite the thing this morning, my dear madam," said the squire, as he gave her a chair. "I hope nothing has occurred to put you out."

"Pardon me, sir," she rejoined. "A great deal has occurred to put me out. I don't think I had a wink of sleep all night. I have been thinking over what I heard yesterday of the probable reconciliation between Stanley and Mildred, and I really cannot make up mind to permit it. I must tell you both plainly what I feel," she added, looking from one to the other.

"I am very much surprised by what you say, mother," observed Stanley, beginning to exhibit symptoms of impatience. "In an affair of this kind it appears to me that I myself am the best judge. If I am satisfied, you ought to be."

"And some respect, surely, ought to be paid to my opinion," said Mr. Warburton, rather sharply. "My view of the case is totally changed from what it was at first. I now know the truth, of which I was ignorant at the time."

"But you were aware that your daughter had eloped, I suppose, sir?" rejoined Mrs. Brereton.

"I was totally unaware of the peculiar character of the elopement, ma'am," said Mr. Warburton. "Darcy's dying confession enlightened me. He completely exonerated Mildred. It was an act of extreme imprudence and folly on her part—but that was all."

Mrs. Brereton stared at him in surprise.

"If I could believe that, I might think differently," she said, gravely.

"I can corroborate the statement," said Stanley. "Folly there has been, as Mr. Warburton has just told you—but nothing more."

"I am very glad of it," said Mrs. Brereton. "My only regret is that matters have proceeded so far with Rose. But she has behaved very well, and though she admits that her disappointment is exceedingly great she declares you shall have no reproaches from her."

"She is a noble-hearted girl," said Stanley.

"I am quite of the same opinion," said the squire.

By this time Mrs. Brereton's displeasure was gone; her looks had become cheerful.

"The ladies shall be immediately acquainted with the explanation you have given me, and I do not think they can have anything more to say against the arrangement. At all events, I consider Stanley has acted properly and shall decidedly support him."

"I am glad to hear you say so, madam," observed Mr. Warburton.

"I am convinced I am acting for the best," said Stanley. "I should have bitterly reproached myself if any ill consequences had ensued, which I could have prevented."

"I will go at once to the ladies, and tell them what I now think," said Mrs. Brereton.

"You will find them in the drawing-room, I make no doubt," said Mr. Warburton. "And I am persuaded they will come round to our opinion. They won't change mine, whatever they say or do."

"Nor mine," added Stanley, as he opened the door for his mother.

Mrs. Brereton found the ladies in the drawing-room, as she expected, looking very cross, while poor Rose appeared extremely despondent.

"Well, what news do you bring?" cried Lady Starkey, eagerly. "Has Stanley become more reasonable?"

"He is more determined than ever to carry out his plans," replied Mrs. Brereton, "and I cannot but approve of the course he is pursuing, after the explanation he has just given me."

"What! you support the reconciliation?" cried Lady Starkey. "I should never have expected it."

"Nor I," added Lady Talmash, equally surprised.

"What will you say when you learn that Mildred's flight was merely a trick to annoy Stanley? There was nothing serious about it."

Lady Starkey laughed incredulously.

"We are not to be duped by such an

explanation as that," she said, "and I can't suppose you are."

"I am satisfied of its truth," rejoined Mrs. Brereton.

"Then you will believe anything," said Lady Talmash.

"It is too absurd to be treated seriously," muttered Rose.

"Nevertheless, I maintain its absolute truth," said Mrs. Brereton. "It was a silly and perilous scheme, very likely to lead to serious consequences, suggested by Darcy and put in practice by him to annoy Stanley. Darcy confessed this with his dying lips to Sister Aline and expressed his deep contrition."

They all looked surprised at this statement, but still remained incredulous.

"Darcy's confession — granted it was made, of which I don't feel certain," said Lady Starkey, "produces no effect on me. He may have had a motive for what he said."

"Probably he desired to clear Mildred and set her right with her husband," said Lady Talmash.

"Such conduct does not seem quite consistent with his character," remarked Rose.

"Not at all," said Mrs. Brereton. "I repeat I entirely believe Sister Aline's statement and acquit Mildred of the grave part of the offence."

At this moment the door opened, and Mildred herself entered the room.

She looked very pale and weak, and was supported by Stanley, and closely followed by her father and Sister Aline.

Lady Starkey and Lady Talmash were quite startled by her unexpected appearance, but they arose and formally saluted her, while Mrs. Brereton and Rose advanced and shook hands with her affectionately.

Though looking extremely pale and delicate, as we have just said, she had acquired a beauty of another and very touching kind, that exercised a powerful effect upon the two ladies who had joined her. Her voice was low and sweet, and her manner remarkably gentle.

Stanley was evidently much offended by

the reception she met with from Lady Starkey and Lady Talmash, and thus addressed them in a cold, sarcastic tone :

"As it is just possible—after what has occurred—that you may not prolong your stay at Beaucliffe, I have brought my wife to bid you adieu."

"I very much regret that circumstances have prevented my seeing you during your stay," said Mildred. "But I have been seriously indisposed, as you are aware——"

"Oh, yes; we are quite aware of it," Lady Starkey hastened to say, in a haughty and somewhat insolent tone. "Had we been aware of your intended return we should not have come here at all."

"Extremely unlikely, I think," said Lady Talmash. "I consider we have been very much affronted."

Mildred took no notice of this rudeness, but Stanley looked excessively angry, and Mr. Warburton got very red in the face.

"I am very sorry you were invited," he said.

"I think we might have been allowed to

depart without annoyance or insult," said Lady Talmash, haughtily.

"Neither annoyance nor insult have at any time been offered to your ladyship," said the squire, "and I cannot allow such an imputation to be made."

"I, too, must contradict it," said Stanley. "Your ladyship has always been treated with the utmost respect while you have stayed at Beaucliffe. That I affirm."

"Pray let me retire, dear Stanley," implored Mildred. "This scene is too much for me. I did not expect it or I would not have come."

"You might have expected it," said Lady Starkey. "But Stanley is chiefly to blame."

"In what way am I to blame?" he rejoined. "I have acted like a man of honour. I have been greatly affronted, but have exacted reparation and punished the offender with death. My wife, I admit, has been indiscreet—very indiscreet—her conduct has been misconstrued, and she has been blamed far too severely. I now proclaim her innocence to you, who have constituted your-

selves her judges. She is innocent of all, save folly."

"That I emphatically declare," said Sister Aline, coming forward, "and I have had the very best opportunity of arriving at the truth. I have listened to a dying man's confession. That man was Darcy himself. With his latest breath he exonerated Mildred."

"If this testimony does not satisfy you, nothing will," said Mr. Warburton.

"It matters not to me what others think, so long as I, myself, am satisfied," said Stanley.

"Oh, thank you! thank you for that declaration," exclaimed Mildred.

And uttering a cry, she fell senseless in his arms.

"You have killed her," he said, looking sternly and reproachfully at the two ladies, as he bore her to a couch, followed by Sister Aline and Rose.

"I'm afraid we have gone rather too far, said Lady Starkey.

"It almost seems so," said Lady Talmash. "I did not believe she was so ill."

"I did not believe your ladyship had so little feeling," remarked Mr. Warburton, who overheard what was said.

"Can I be of any service to your daughter, sir?" said Lady Starkey to him.

"Not in the least," he replied, angrily. "You are more likely to do her harm than good. I beg you won't go near her—nor you," he added to Lady Talmash.

"I really am excessively sorry for what has occurred," said the latter lady.

"Your ladyship can't expect me to believe you," he rejoined. "If anything happens, I shall attribute it entirely to you and Lady Starkey."

Fortunately, Sister Aline always carried restoratives about her, and before this a few drops of sal volatile had been administered to Mildred and produced a beneficial effect.

"Pray allow me to remain here till your daughter recovers, Mr. Warburton?" said

Lady Starkey. "I will then relieve you of my presence."

"I must beg a like favour of you, sir," added Lady Talmash.

"Stay as long as you like, ladies," replied the easily mollified old gentleman, moving towards his daughter, who had now completely regained consciousness.

"Are they gone?" she asked, as he came up.

"Who, my love?" he inquired.

"Lady Starkey and Lady Talmash."

"No, my darling," he rejoined. "They are still here."

"Then beg them to come to me for a moment," she said,

"Better not," he rejoined.

But, moved by her looks, he consented and went to them.

"My daughter would fain say a word to you before you go. If you grant her request, I must beg that you will not excite her."

Contrary to his anticipations, they both instantly went back with him. Sister Aline,

Mrs. Brereton and the others, standing near the sofa, drew back as they came up.

Mildred regarded them very affectionately, and they were evidently much touched by her looks, and reproached themselves for their conduct.

"We are so very glad you have recovered, dearest Mildred," said Lady Talmash, taking her hand. "If anything had happened to you I should never have forgiven myself —never!"

"I know you are the most amiable creature breathing," said Lady Starkey, approaching on the other side of the sofa. "Pray think no more of what has just occurred!"

"I won't," replied Mildred. "But you must promise not to leave me."

"We will stay till you get quite well," said Lady Starkey.

"Even if you should be a month about it," added Lady Talmash.

"Don't be afraid! I shall get well directly now," said Mildred, with the sweetest smile imaginable.

"I am so glad your ladyship has come round to my opinion," said Mrs. Brereton, drawing near Lady Starkey.

Everybody now seemed to think the two ladies had completely made amends for their previous rudeness. Even Stanley's anger had abated.

After a little quiet conversation with them, Mildred retired to her own room attended by Stanley and Sister Aline.

Before withdrawing she said to Rose:

"If I don't come down to-morrow, you must come up to me. I should like to have a little talk with you."

"You will be sure to see me," replied the other, highly pleased by the invitation.

"All has ended very much better than I expected at one time," said Lady Starkey. "I was touched to the heart by Mildred's looks."

"She looked like an angel," added Lady Talmash. "I don't believe any ill of her."

"Every possible care must be taken of

her," said Rose. "I'm sure she is exceedingly delicate."

"I almost fear she is in a consumption," said Lady Starkey.

"She ought to spend next winter in the South of France," said Lady Talmash.

II.

SUPPER IN THE SERVANTS' HALL.

"I AM glad that those two important dames didn't take their departure," said Mildred, as she entered her own room with her companions. "A quarrel with them just now would have troubled me very much."

"I confess I should be glad to get rid of them," said Stanley. "They have fixed themselves here and mean to stay."

"But they are agreeable guests," said Mildred.

"Agreeable when they have it all their way. But not when their plans are thwarted, as has just been shown."

"I think them designing and somewhat malicious," remarked Sister Aline.

"And you judge them rightly," said Stanley. "They *are* designing. Lady Starkey fancied at one time that she should gain Mr. Warburton's hand. But they are both disappointed since Mildred's return. That is the real cause of their vexation."

"So I should suppose," said Sister Aline. "But will Mr. Warburton marry again, do you think?"

"Certainly not now, since Mildred has come back," replied Stanley. "What he might have done, had she left us altogether, I cannot say."

"No, no, I'm quite sure papa won't marry again," said Mildred. "Those two ladies would never have been established here, had I been at home. But they have completely failed. Rose Hylton, I think, is a very nice, amiable girl."

"So she is," said Stanley. "My mother likes her extremely."

Just then, Georgette's voice was heard

at the door, and Sister Aline bade her come in.

On entering, she said she had been invited to supper that evening in the servants' hall, and asked if she might accept the invitation.

Her mistress replied in the affirmative, but said she must return to her own room before ten.

"That will be quite late enough for me," said Georgette, and she withdrew.

"Who is that pretty soubrette?" inquired Stanley.

"She was formerly my attendant," replied Sister Aline. "I brought her with me from Dieppe. She witnessed your duel with Darcy. She has been very useful, and I shall take her back with me when I return."

"No, you must leave her with me," said Mildred. "I have become very fond of her and should be quite grieved to part with her."

"Well, she shall remain with you, if you wish it," replied the sister.

Georgette's good looks, liveliness and pretty figure, set off by a very becoming costume, caused quite a sensation among the men-servants at Beaucliffe, who were all charmed with her. Mr. Glossop, the portly butler, who placed her between himself and Dominique, the French cook, at supper, declared she was better looking than any lady in the house; and the two valets, Robert and Charles, agreed with him in opinion. Buckland, the coachman, and Warton, the groom, regarded her with admiration, as did the *chef*, who was fortunate enough to have her near him.

As may be supposed, the many lady's maids, housemaids, and other female servants, assembled in the hall, did not admire her so much as the men, but even they were compelled to admit that she was extremely captivating.

Though she didn't speak English very fluently, she managed to make herself understood, as much by her eyes and gestures as by her words, and Dominique acted as her interpreter.

Besides which, the attentive *chef* took care to help her to all the best dishes, so that she did very well — especially as Glossop had provided a bottle of Clicquot for his particular friends.

Animated by a couple of glasses of this inspiriting wine, which often unlocks the secrets of the heart, Georgette questioned Dominique as to what had recently occurred at the Hall, and learnt from him the full particulars of Madame Stanley Brereton's elopement with le Capitaine Darcy.

"It is the custom, among the family, to regard it is a mere innocent caprice, *une boutade à taquiner son mari*, but I confess I cannot look upon it so lightly."

"Then you don't understand our sex, Maitre Dominique," returned Georgette. "I saw the duel between the husband and the betrayer at Dieppe, and a most terrible affair it was. I know *le galant capitaine* proclaimed madame's entire inocence, *avec sa dernière parole.* What could he do more?"

"Not much, certainly," replied Domi-

nique. "But under such circumstances he ought never to have gone away with her. Besides, he came secretly to the Hall, since her return, to carry her off again."

"All that has been explained," cried Georgette. "No insinuation shall prejudice me against her. I think her just like a *sainte*."

"What saint are you talking about?" inquired Glossop.

"Saint Mildred," replied Dominique.

"Madame Stanley Brereton," explained Georgette. "I adore her. She is so beautiful—so good."

"She is all you describe," rejoined the butler. "But I'm sadly afraid she won't live long."

"Oh, don't frighten me!" exclaimed Georgette. "I shall die myself if she dies."

"No, don't do that," said Glossop. "Those ladies have behaved to her in a most unfeeling manner."

"*Honteusement!*" cried Georgette. "But all is now arranged to their satisfaction—so they won't interfere any more."

"I hope not, but don't feel sure," rejoined Glossop.

The evening was finished by a rubber at whist, played in a small room near the butler's pantry, between Glossop himself and Georgette, against Dominique and Lady Starkey's lady's maid.

Glossop played a very good game, and was tolerably well satisfied with his partner.

"It never can happen," he said, "but I should amazingly like to play a rubber with the squire. I think he would be satisfied with me."

"No doubt he would," said Dominique. Then addressing himself to Georgette, he added, "You must take care not to say anything about cards, mamzelle, when you go up-stairs."

"Are cards interdicted?" she inquired.

"Rigorously," he replied.

"But we are not playing for money," she said.

"Pardon, mamzelle," he rejoined, with a significant smile, "Maitre Glossop and I

have some slight stakes. I already owe him twenty shillings."

"*Mon Dieu*!" she exclaimed. "*Vous êtes grands joueurs!*"

"This is nothing to what we sometimes do at écarté," said Glossop, laughing. "Shall we have another game and change partners?"

"Oh! *non! non!*" cried Georgette, intimating by her gestures, that she could not stay a moment longer.

"You must promise to sup with us again soon," said Dominique, catching her hand and pressing it to his lips.

Glossop would have snatched the other hand, but she broke away from them, and next moment was skipping up-stairs towards Sister Aline's room.

"Well, Georgette," said her mistress, "I hope you have had a pleasant evening."

"Charming, madame, charming!" she replied. "I have another invitation and hope you will permit me to accept it."

"I will consider to-morrow. Are you aware you are half an hour late?"

"Is it possible, madame? I did not think so. But time flies swiftly, when one is amused. Pray forgive me!"

"Well, go to the next room and see whether Madame Stanley Brereton wants you."

Georgette readily obeyed, and Mildred, who had already sought her couch, bade her sit down beside her.

"I want to ask you a question, Georgette. Shall you be content to remain with me when Sister Aline returns to Dieppe?"

"More than content, madame. I shall be delighted. I hope you will always keep me with you. I will serve you faithfully and well."

"I have no doubt of it," rejoined Mildred. "I have a foreboding that I shall not live long."

"Madame must not despair. I confidently believe she will recover."

"No, Georgette; there is no chance of that. But with care, I may last a few months longer. You must give me that care."

"Rest assured, I will, madame," said Georgette, earnestly, almost solemnly, "I will devote myself to you."

"Then there is no knowing what good results may follow," said Mildred.

"It may be a satisfaction to madame to learn how attached to her are the other servants. I had an opportunity of proving it this evening."

"I'm very glad to hear it, Georgette. And now I will wish you good night. Recollect that henceforward you belong to me."

"I shall not forget it," she replied.

And kissing the hand of her new mistress, she withdrew.

Mildred slept more tranquilly that night than she had done for some time.

III.

AN ACCIDENT ON THE MERE.

THE peaceful slumber Mildred had enjoyed was of so much service to her, that Georgette, on entering her room next morning, noticed an improvement in her looks and declared, if madame would only go on in this way for a month, no fears need be entertained about her.

"I certainly feel better, to-day," said Mildred, "and if the weather continues fine I shall walk out into the garden. You must accompany me, Georgette."

"I shall be delighted, madame," replied the attendant.

"Perhaps I may be able to reach the Mere?"

"What is that, madame?"

"The lake at the bottom of the garden."

"Oh, I have always admired it so much. I think it so beautiful."

"So it is," replied Mildred. "I once used to be very fond of rowing upon it; but I have given that up lately, as I have horse exercise."

"Yes, I have always understood madame used to be a famous equestrian."

Mildred smiled.

"I had far more enjoyment in riding to hounds than in any other sport," she said.

"Then why give it up?" cried Georgette.

"I have not strength for it now," she replied, rather sadly.

"But madame's strength will return."

"I hope it may, but I have great doubts."

"Madame must go and visit the stables. I understand none of her favourite hunters have been sold."

"Though I once was passionately fond

of them, I have never inquired about them since my return. But I shouldn't wonder if it is so. Papa was always so kind. But dear Sister Aline would be dreadfully shocked if I should begin to hunt again. She would think the chase wholly inconsistent with my professions. And so it would be."

"But madame might go out occasionally merely for the benefit of her health."

"No, it would lead to other things. I must resist temptation. I have become a penitent and must act consistently with that character."

"You are quite right," said Sister Aline, who had entered the room unperceived and overheard the discourse. "I, myself, see no harm in hunting, quietly conducted; but there are certain dangers connected with it, on which I need not dwell, and I think you had better avoid all temptation. I only hope you are not miscalculating your strength."

"Yes, I must be a very different person from that I now am, if I am ever able to

enter the hunting field again. I often wonder at myself when I think of what I have done."

"I know you were considered the boldest and best female equestrian in Cheshire at one time," said Sister Aline, "and so much was said in your praise that no wonder your head was a little turned."

"I was very vain in those days," said Mildred.

"And not without reason," murmured Georgette. "Shall I serve breakfast?" she added aloud.

"Yes, in the next room," replied Mildred.

"Can I do anything more for madame before I go?"

"No; we will come to you in half an hour," said Sister Aline. "Have all ready for us."

Georgette disappeared, and at the appointed time the others joined her.

A very simple meal, consisting of two basins of new milk and slices of bread, without butter or any other addition, awaited them.

But Georgette fared much better. Not only had she hot coffee, with boiling milk, but toast and a couple of poached eggs, in her own room.

About an hour later, when Stanley came up-stairs, he found them all prepared for a walk on the lawn, and on hearing Mildred's desire of visiting the Mere he expressed his satisfaction.

"You could not have chosen a better day," he said; "and even if you go on the water, I don't think you will take any harm."

Never had the smooth-shaven lawn looked more inviting than on that charming morning, and Georgette, who followed the party, was positively enraptured, and constantly uttered exclamations of delight.

She admired the garden and the lawn, as we have just said. She admired the fine wood skirting the Mere and was enchanted with the Mere itself, which she thought the most beautiful sheet of water she had ever beheld. She had seen it at a distance, but had never stood beside it as she did now,

and she thought those gentle slopes with the lovely expanse of water they bordered were most exquisite.

While gazing at the banks she perceived a boat chained to a post, and longed to embark in it, but her mistress made no proposition to that effect—nor did Stanley. In fact, the party contented themselves with standing on the bank and contemplating the fair scene. Every moment some fresh beauties were discovered.

"I dare not suggest a row on the Mere for fear I should do wrong," said Stanley. "But it looks uncommonly tempting."

"The aspect of the lake revives all my former feeling, and the day is so warm and genial that I cannot think half an hour on the water would do me harm. But here comes papa," as the squire was seen approaching with Rose; "let us consult him. I want your permission to go on the water," she said to him.

"Well, I think I may safely give it you," he replied.

"I will take an oar if you want one," said Rose.

"Then we shall do famously," remarked Stanley. "The boat is large enough to hold us all. I will go and bring it here."

"I will go with you," said Rose.

The boat was at no great distance, and in two or three minutes they had unfastened it and brought it close to the bank. It did not belong to the light skiff class, but was large and roomy and well adapted to such a party as were now about to embark in it.

Mildred sat between Sister Aline and Georgette. The latter had gained the object of her wishes and could scarcely restrain her delight.

When everybody was settled, Stanley and his fair assistant pushed off and rowed slowly towards the further end of the Mere.

Familiar with the beauties of the place, the squire pointed them out to Rose, who was charmed with all she beheld.

There was nothing remarkable in the

surroundings of the lake, but the banks were soft and gentle. Nothing grand or striking. Only a solitary rock amid the woods, from which it was supposed the mansion derived its name.

On this picturesque crag it was said that an eagle once built its nest, and killed a youth, who attempted to rob it of its young. No doubt, the squire had good right to be proud of this part of his park, as he himself had caused its full beauties to be developed by judiciously thinning the timber, and had likewise carefully protected the oldest trees.

To Rose's credit it ought to be mentioned that she managed an oar quite as skilfully as Stanley, nor could he have had a better assistant. Mildred praised her highly.

They rowed to the bottom of the lake, and remained there for half an hour to look about them, but did not disembark.

As they lingered at this point, the beauty of the day seemed to increase, and the lake became so attractive that all the occu-

pants of the boat were unwilling to return. Mildred said she should like to spend the whole day on the Mere, while Rose echoed the wish; and it is certain Georgette would have done so, had she dared.

The view of the mansion, as they returned, was greatly admired, and the boat was more than once stopped to enable its occupants to study the picture.

"It was on this side of the lake, but a little nearer the bank, that the beautiful Virginia Massey was drowned," said the squire. "I have no doubt you have seen her portrait at the Hall. A lovely creature, and her death caused the greatest affliction to her friends, whose distress was heightened by the fact that she was close upon her wedding-day. Her intended husband was with her at the time and made great, but ineffectual, efforts to save her."

"You say she was drowned in this part of the lake, sir?" said Rose.

"Not twenty yards from where we now are," replied the squire. "Pull a little to-

wards the bank and you will come to the exact spot."

There was nothing to be seen, but Rose acted on the squire's suggestion, took two or three strokes with the oar and then ceased rowing.

Once more the spot was nearly proving fatal.

On reaching it she rose in her seat, and looked over the side of the boat. The squire got up at the same time, meaning to pull her back, but instead of doing so he pushed her overboard. Her fall into the lake caused the greatest terror among those in the boat, and loud cries arose from all.

The squire, who had tried to grasp her, failed in doing so, and only made matters worse, as he nearly upset the boat. Several hands were extended to the unlucky girl, but she could not reach one of them, and sank.

Not a moment was now to be lost, and jumping into the water, Stanley seized hold of her when she came to the surface and

sustained her till she could be pulled into the boat by the squire and Georgette.

Stanley did not care to get in again, but laying hold of a rope, which the squire flung to him, soon brought the boat to the bank.

Notwithstanding the fright and immersion she had undergone, Rose did not seem much worse. She called out to thank Stanley for preserving her from the fate of Virginia Massey, and likewise warmly thanked the squire, but said nothing about his having accidentally pushed her overboard.

As soon as they reached the shore, Stanley urged her to run as fast as she could to the house and change her dress, and Mildred sent Georgette with her. As to Stanley, he did not mind his ducking—all he seemed to care for was his hat, which he thought was spoiled.

The squire took upon himself the entire blame of the accident.

"It was all my fault," he said, "and if that charming girl had shared the fate of

Virginia Massey, I should never have forgiven myself."

"I was very much afraid she would have been drowned," said Mildred.

"I thought all was over with her and had begun to breathe a prayer for her soul, when Stanley leaped into the water and rescued her," said Sister Aline.

"After this accident I don't think I shall ever venture on the lake again," said Mildred.

The alarm had now been given at the house, and while they were still standing on the bank, several men-servants, including Glossop and Dominique, came hurrying down, as fast as they could, to express their anxiety and offer assistance.

They were followed, though not so quickly, by Lady Starkey, Lady Talmash, and Mrs. Brereton—all three looking greatly alarmed. The latter could scarcely be prevented from embracing her son, even by the dripping state of his apparel. Fearing he would take a severe cold if he remained as he was, she insisted on his returning

immediately to the Hall and putting on some dry clothes.

"Yes, yes, go at once," said the squire. "You have acted most imprudently in keeping on the wet things so long. I shall be blamed for it all."

"Most certainly you will, papa," said Mildred. "I hope the mischief is not already done."

"No, don't be uneasy," said Stanley. "I'll answer for myself."

And he set off to the Hall as fast as he could, and having made the necessary change in his attire and put on another hat, rejoined the party on the lawn.

IV.

A WINTER IN THE SOUTH OF FRANCE PROPOSED FOR MILDRED.

THE occurrence on the Mere, in which Stanley played so conspicuous a part, seemed to afford him extreme satisfaction—and no wonder, since everybody, even the men-servants, regarded him as a sort of hero.

Soon afterwards, Rose herself appeared on the lawn, attended by Georgette. She had been provided with one of Mildred's morning dresses, and looked remarkably well in it.

After thanking Stanley most warmly for the great services he had rendered her, she

said, "I can never forget that you have saved my life."

"The reflection will always be most gratifying to me," he replied.

"Had he not rescued you I should never have felt happy again," said the squire; "since I was the cause of the accident. And I can assure you, my dear young lady, I felt a sharper pang than I have ever before experienced when you fell into the water."

"Pray think of it no more, sir," said Rose. "I know what you meant to do."

The day was so fine that the majority of the party remained on the lawn for some time longer. Mildred was the first to retire, and she took with her Sister Aline and Georgette.

A better understanding than had previously subsisted between Mildred and Rose seemed to have sprung up between them, and when they separated they kissed each other affectionately.

"I hope I shall see you to-morrow," said

Mildred, "if the day is fine. I shall certainly come here; but shall only admire the lake at a distance."

"My unexpected plunge has not at all alarmed me," said Rose, "and I should not object to another row to-morrow."

"Be prudent," said Stanley. "I may not always be at hand to help you."

"I must speak to papa, and tell him he will be responsible for any future mishap," said Mildred.

Rose laughed.

Mildred and those with her now entered the house and proceeded to their own rooms; while Rose and Stanley took possession of a bench, charmingly placed near a bed of roses.

Here let us leave them for a time, and visit another bench on the opposite side of the lawn, where we shall find Lady Starkey in the full enjoyment of a tête-à-tête with the squire.

"I am thinking of returning to town almost immediately," she said.

"Indeed!" he exclaimed. "I am very sorry to hear it. I hope it is not a sudden resolution."

"Not altogether sudden," she rejoined. "But I begin to think I have outstayed my welcome."

"Pray don't entertain any such notion," he replied. "I intend to give a garden party or two, and a dinner, almost immediately. I hope you will stay for them."

"I cannot positively promise," she replied; "but I won't leave before if I can help it. How things are changed!" she exclaimed, with a deep sigh. "At one time I persuaded myself that I should remain here altogether. I fancied you wished me to become mistress of Beaucliffe."

Somewhat embarrassed the squire did not exactly know what sort of answer to make.

"I thought you had quite changed your mind," he said.

"You could not have entertained such a poor opinion of me," she rejoined. "I was quite prepared to fulfil my engagement, and I expected you to fulfil yours."

"Difficulties I had not foreseen arose," said the squire—"insuperable difficulties."

"And these still exist, I suppose?" said Lady Starkey. "Let us come to a clear understanding."

"I fear so," he replied. "Nothing, I need scarcely say, could be more gratifying to me than a union with a person of your ladyship's distinction and accomplishments, but I am obliged to abandon the idea."

"Why so?" demanded Lady Starkey. "You have not been rejected by me."

"But you have assumed such a hostile form to my daughter and her husband that I fear a perfect reconciliation between you is impossible; and, without that, happiness could not be expected while living together in the same house, and constantly meeting. I have a suggestion to offer to your ladyship. Release me from my promise, which cannot be satisfactorily carried out—but remain here, with as much authority as you have hitherto enjoyed, as long as you think proper."

"Well, I consent," she replied. "I con-

fess I am very comfortable here; but if I should become tired of the place I can run up to town at any time."

"Exactly," replied the squire, "and return when you think proper. From the present state of my dear child's health, I fear I may expect to lose her, and in that case there can be no obstacle—at least, on my part—to our union Does this arrangement suit your ladyship?"

"Perfectly," she replied.

"Then let us take a walk round the lawn."

She delightedly acceded to the proposal.

Rose and Stanley still occupied the bench they had chosen. They looked graver than they did, for they were discussing the possibility of Lady Starkey's immediate return to town, in which case Rose would have to accompany her.

"I don't think my mother will consent to part with you," said Stanley. "Of late you have become quite necessary to her."

"I have tried to make myself useful," replied Rose. "But I really am fond of

Mrs. Brereton, and no doubt she perceives it. I don't believe I shall ever be as happy again, as I have been at the old Hall. I like it quite as well as Beaucliffe—in some respects better."

"You are very kind to say so, but I should scarcely think that possible," he replied. "For instance, we have nothing at Brereton like this lovely lawn, or the Mere. It is strange that Mildred never could reconcile herself to the old house."

"Your mother says she took an early dislike to the place, and never tried to overcome it."

"I believe that's true. I should like to consult you about Mildred's health. My mother is seriously alarmed. What is your opinion?"

"My opinion is that she ought not to pass another winter in this rigorous climate. She must go to Nice, or some place in the South of France."

"Will you and Sister Aline accompany her?" asked Stanley, anxiously.

"I will go with her if she wishes it,"

replied Rose; "and I am quite sure Sister Aline is too devoted to her to leave her at such a critical juncture. I trust she may be restored to perfect health."

"I trust she may," echoed Stanley. "But I confess I am very doubtful. Still, the mild climate may work wonders. I am greatly obliged by your prompt compliance with my request."

"Depend upon it, I will do all I can," said Rose, earnestly. "I pity her exceedingly, and I love her as much as I pity her. If I can do nothing else, I can help to make her latter days happy."

"That is exactly what I desire," said Stanley, with a grateful look. "With you and Sister Aline to tend her, I feel that nothing will be wanting either in personal comfort or religious consolation. It is sad that she cannot pass her last hours in the house where she was born, and where she has always lived, but I believe this to be her only chance."

"I am sure it is," said Rose.

"I do not think she ever had a day's

illness until she quitted her father's house, and returned almost in a dying state," said Stanley.

"What a change!" exclaimed Rose.

"At one time I suspected poison——"

"Poison!" exclaimed Rose.

"But I have since dismissed the injurious thought from my breast."

"You are right to do so," said Rose. "One person only could have committed the crime, and I believe him to be utterly incapable of it."

"I acquit him entirely," said Stanley. "I attribute her sufferings entirely to remorse—the effect of which has been as terrible as that of poison itself."

Rose made no reply, but her looks showed that she entertained the same opinion.

"It is from this conviction that I anticipate the difficulty of a perfect cure. It is a disease of the mind rather than the body, and hitherto all her penitence has proved unavailing."

"I do not despair," said Rose. "Tran-

quility of mind may be restored. She has looked much easier of late."

Just then the squire and Lady Starkey came up.

"You don't seem, from your looks, to be holding a very lively conversation," said her ladyship.

"We are talking of dear Mildred," replied Rose. "Stanley agrees with me that she must pass next winter in the South of France. I have promised to take charge of her, and we hope to prevail on Sister Aline to go with us."

"I entirely approve of the plan," said the squire. "It gives me the greatest possible pain to see her, as it were, dying by inches, and I hope you may be enabled to restore her to her former health. I don't suppose she will object to go, but you must not make quite certain."

"Of course, the decision will be left entirely to her," said Stanley; "but I do not anticipate any difficulty. On the contrary, I think she will be greatly pleased by the proposition."

"There is only one thing against it," said the squire. "She told me she would never leave this house again."

"When she knows we hope to restore her to health, she may think differently," said Rose. "As I fully believe her life depends on the change, I urge it strenuously."

"If your opinion is confirmed, not a word can be said," rejoined the squire.

"I have always heard that the shores of the Mediterranean offer a charming climate for invalids," said Lady Starkey, "and I therefore must support my niece's opinion."

"Do you feel inclined to go to Nice for the winter, aunt?" asked Rose.

Lady Starkey looked at the squire.

"I should prefer Cannes, or Mentone, from what I hear of them," he said. "But I don't think I shall leave Beaucliffe, unless Mildred wishes to have me with her. You must stop and take care of the house for me," he added to Lady Starkey.

"That I will, with pleasure," she rejoined.

"Well, if this arrangement should be

carried out, let us hope it may be satisfactory to everybody, and, above all, beneficial to Mildred," said Stanley. "Here comes Lady Talmash. Perhaps she may go with us. Your ladyship has come most *à propos*. Are you inclined to spend the winter at Nice? Because I intend to take Mildred there, and give her the advantage of the climate, and shall be delighted if you will join the party."

"I should really like it very much, and think the change would be serviceable to myself. If you and Mildred desire it, I will go with you."

"I am very glad to hear it, and shall hold you to the engagement," said Stanley. "I need scarcely tell you we shall live very quietly, and avoid all excitement, but you can do just as you like, dine at the table d'hôte, go to balls, concerts, card parties, and mix in all the dissipations of the place."

"Possibly I may. I shall not lay down any rule, but do what seems most agreeable at the time. On one thing you may

rely, I shall not expect you constantly to attend on me."

"Had you intimated any such wish, I should have been obliged to excuse myself. Mildred will require all my care, and I mean to devote myself to her."

"I entirely approve of your resolution, and think it does you great credit. Under such circumstances as these, I shall be enchanted to form one of the party. Lady Starkey, I suppose, is not going with you."

"No. Her ladyship prefers staying at Beaucliffe, and will take care of the squire."

"Everything seems to be capitally arranged. I hope we shall be able to carry it out."

While thus conversing, they had gradually approached the house, and now entered the drawing-room through the open window.

V.

MR. WARBURTON FORMALLY ANNOUNCES HIS INTENDED MARRIAGE WITH LADY STARKEY.

NEXT day, Mr. Warburton and Lady Starkey had a long tête-à-tête in the library, the result of which was a formal announcement on the part of the squire that the engagement he had entered into with her ladyship would be speedily carried out.

This announcement did not occasion much surprise, since the probability of the marriage had been discussed by everybody, but it seemed to give general satisfaction, for her ladyship was much liked, and Mrs. Twemlow, the housekeeper, Glossop, Domi-

nique, and the two footmen, thought she would make a very good mistress.

Before coming to a decision, the squire had argued the matter with himself pretty much in this way.

"I don't think I can do better than marry her ladyship, who will do me credit in every respect. She is a most lady-like, charming woman, and will make Beaucliffe what it used to be in former days—a most attractive and agreeable house. I feel I am quite safe with her. That unfortunate elopement has done us great mischief. I cannot explain it to everybody, and the only way to set it right is to place an unmistakable lady at the head of the establishment. We shall all stand better when that is done. Besides, she has a clear three thousand a year, and that is not to be despised. On the whole, I think I ought to consider myself lucky; and I am chiefly fortunate in having gained a lady, who will sit so well at the head of my table. I fancy I see her there now. I am very glad poor dear Mildred is going to Nice, as it will prevent any possibility of misunder-

standing between her and the new mistress of the house, and I dare say the party can be induced to set out for the South of France some two or three months earlier."

These reflections were interrupted by the entrance of the lady herself into the library, and no sooner did she appear than the gallant squire hastened to meet her, and leading her to a sofa, sat down beside her.

"Your ladyship has had sufficient experience of Beaucliffe and its ways to know whether you are likely to be happy here. I will do all I can to make you so, and if devoted regard will content you, you shall have it. I should certainly never have taken another spouse, not even your ladyship—if Mildred's marriage had turned out well—because there would inevitably have been a certain rivalry between you which I could not have controlled. But now all will be pleasant, and my table will once more be graced by one who must command admiration and respect. I do not wish to flatter your ladyship, but the truth ought to be spoken. With regard to myself I will men-

tion the sort of life I propose to lead. I shall live chiefly in the country, for the country suits me best, and I am used to it; and I shall keep a certain amount of company, and I think your ladyship won't object."

"Not in the least," she replied. "I shall like it."

"But though I shall endeavour to maintain the character I have acquired of a hearty country squire, I shall not object to run up to town occasionally, and I should be very sorry, indeed, if your ladyship were to let your house in Berkeley-square."

"I should never think of letting it without some special reason," she replied. "I am very fond of that house."

"Well, then, we quite understand each other, and as nobody will interfere with us I think we shall do very well."

"I'm sure we shall," she replied. "And now let me ask you a question. Do you wish our nuptials to take place here or in town?"

"I don't care," he replied. "But I should

like them to be very quiet wherever they occur."

"Just my own feeling," replied her ladyship. "I could not bear a grand wedding, and I really believe all may be managed more quietly in town than here. Shall we go to St. George's?"

"Nothing can be done quietly there," replied the squire, laughing. "I picture to myself half the square full of splendid carriages, with any number of gorgeously attired lacqueys collected on the steps."

"Don't be alarmed," said her ladyship. "If we are married at St. George's, the business shall be very quietly conducted. That I promise you."

"Then I agree. But I couldn't stand a regular West-end wedding. I'm too old for it."

"Your taste shall be consulted," she rejoined. "I suppose you won't have a great *déjeuner?*"

"What for?—if there will be so few guests to partake of it. But I leave all to you."

"In my opinion, the first thing to be settled," said Lady Starkey, "is the journey to Nice. As soon as they are gone, there will be no more interference, and you can make any arrangements you think proper. Get them off as soon as you can. If the journey is delayed till the winter, something will occur to interfere with it, and it may never take place at all."

"I quite agree with your ladyship that it will be best for them to start as soon as they can, and I think this desirable object may be accomplished without any great difficulty. Let us see whether any of them are on the lawn."

On walking forth they found the whole party assembled there. To their great satisfaction Mildred and Sister Aline had expressed a strong desire to proceed to the shores of the Mediterranean without delay.

"If I go there immediately I may derive some benefit," said Mildred to Stanley, "but if I wait till the winter I believe it will be too late."

"At all events you can prolong your

visit if you find the climate suits you," said Stanley. "It is quite clear you derive no real benefit from your stay here."

"I cannot perceive any improvement, I confess," said Sister Aline. "But the shores of the Mediterranean may really benefit her, and therefore ought to be tried."

"I am confident the climate will cure her," said Rose.

"I don't like to offer an opinion," said Lady Starkey, "but I should think the late summer must be the best season for an invalid."

"Let there be no delay whatever," said the squire. "Since everybody fancies Nice, try it. If it suits you, remain there. If you don't improve after a fair trial—say two or three months—come back."

"Our preparations for early departure must immediately be made," said Stanley. "I should think you can all be ready in a week."

"In half that time," Rose replied.

While this conversation was going on, the squire had looked anxiously at Mildred,

and became apprehensive that her life would not be long, whatever benefit she might derive from a milder climate.

Greatly moved, he took her hand, and led her to some distance from the others.

"Tell me frankly, my dear child," he said. "You are certain that you desire this proposed journey to the South of France?"

"I like the notion of it exceedingly, dearest papa, and feel almost certain that I shall benefit by it. My chief fear is that my strength may not last."

Looking at her with indescribable tenderness, the squire said:

"If, instead of regaining strength, you become more feeble, do not remain there till it may be too late to move, but return—promise me that!"

"I promise it," she replied. "I would fain breathe my last at Beaucliffe, and I will not put off my return here till it may be impossible."

Overcome by his feelings, Mr. Warburton remained silent for a few minutes, and then asked in broken accents:

"Is there anything you would have done during your absence?"

"I only wish you to see that my horses are cared for," she replied. "Never again shall I mount one of my favourite hunters—but I still love them as much as ever."

"Don't despair, my darling!" said the squire. "I scarcely dare hold out hopes, but I trust your strength may return, and that you may be able to ride as boldly as in former days."

"Never, dear papa, I do not expect it. But I do not wish my stables to be broken up."

"Rest easy about that. Not a single horse shall be sold or given away without your permission. But I ought to prepare you. When you come back, you will find Beaucliffe changed in some respects."

"There will be a new mistress of the house—ha!" she rejoined. "It cost me a pang at first. But I am now reconciled to it. You could not have chosen better."

"You really think so?"

"I do," she replied. "I fully believe Lady Starkey will make you happy, and I shall be happy to see you so."

"I believe the house will be more comfortable than it has been of late, for I need scarcely tell you it has been very unsettled."

"I know it—I know it—and I also know how valuable to you will be Lady Starkey's experience and management."

"Just my feeling," replied the squire. "But now to come back to your proposed journey to the South of France. I shall feel better satisfied if I have a good, sound, medical opinion as to the benefit to be derived from the change, and I shall, therefore, send a telegraphic message to Dr. Baguley, of Chester, begging him to come over here to-morrow to meet Mr. Newton, our old surgeon, so that they may hold a consultation together on your case. What say you, darling?"

"You know the great dislike I have to be governed by medical opinions, papa."

"Yes, you have shown it by constantly refusing to see Mr. Newton, but you must submit now, or I may be blamed."

"Very well, send for the doctors, and I will see them; but I must state beforehand, that whatever they may say, I won't give up my proposed journey to Nice."

"Then you are bent upon going?"

"Quite determined, and I really think I shall be best out of the way for a few months, till you get certain affairs settled."

"Well, come back to the others," said the squire, "and I will go and send off my telegram to Chester, and a mounted messenger to Mr. Newton."

VI.

A MEDICAL CONSULTATION AND ITS RESULT.

NEXT morning, at eleven o'clock, Dr. Baguley and Mr. Newton answered the summons they had received, and were ushered by Glossop into the library, where they found Mr. Warburton.

Both had a large country practice, and were men of considerable ability. Neither had seen Mrs. Stanley Brereton since her return to Beaucliffe, and there was something mysterious in her conduct that perplexed them.

"I wish to consult you, gentlemen, about my daughter, Mrs. Stanley Brereton," said

the squire. "As you will see presently, she is in a very delicate state of health—consumption, I fear—and believes she would be much benefitted by passing a couple of months at Nice."

"I have no doubt of it," said Dr. Baguley. "But the proper season for Nice is the winter."

"I should recommend that her departure be delayed for two or three months," said Mr. Newton. "She will gain nothing. Our own climate just now is as good as the other."

"But she persuades herself that her only hope of recovery is in an immediate change," said the squire. "She believes she will not live till the winter if she remains."

"But the shores of the Mediterranean are not without danger," remarked Dr. Baguley. "The mistral frequently prevails there at this time of the year, and that wind is very dangerous to invalids."

Just then the door was opened by the butler, and Mildred came in, accompanied by Stanley.

The two medical men, who were seated, immediately arose and advanced to meet her, both being extremely struck by her delicate appearance.

After regarding her for a few minutes, they consulted each other by a look, the result of which was not very favourable to the invalid. Dr. Baguley likewise felt her pulse, and shook his head.

"You will do better where you are than by going to Nice," he remarked.

"Decidedly," said Mr. Newton. "I recommend you to keep quiet."

"But my wife believes that her life may be saved by a visit to Nice," said Stanley.

"I do," she said. "And I am certain I am doomed if I remain here."

"You are mistaken," said Dr. Baguley. "I could not advise you to go to Nice now —nor could Mr. Newton."

"Certainly not," replied the other.

"But I mean to go, whatever may be the consequences," said Mildred.

"You must not permit your wife to sacrifice herself thus, sir," said Mr. Newton.

"I really cannot help it, gentlemen," rejoined Stanley. "She is determined to go, and I think opposition may do more harm than good."

"Of course a great deal will depend upon the weather," remarked Dr. Baguley. "If it happens to be favourable, she may do very well, but my chief fear is from the dry north-west wind—or mistral—should that prevail. There are several very able physicians at Nice, so you are always sure of good advice."

"I am very glad to hear that," replied the squire.

"Have you any further questions to ask me, gentlemen?" said Mildred. "If not, I will retire."

"No, there is no need to detain you, madam," replied Mr. Newton, gravely. "We have all the information we require, and Dr. Baguley and myself will consult together before our departure, and write out a few prescriptions which we will leave with your husband."

"We need not advise you to be very

careful," said Dr. Baguley. "Your life depends upon your care."

Mildred then quitted the room, attended by Stanley, who returned in a few minutes, and found the two medical men seated at a writing-table, engaged in deep consultation, and looking very grave.

"I very much doubt whether you will be able to bring your wife back alive to England, Mr. Brereton," said Dr. Baguley, giving him three or four prescriptions, which he had placed in the envelope. "Her case is a peculiar one, and I am afraid it is already too far advanced to be checked. But she may be soothed, and that is important. We will see her again before her departure."

"Pray do so," said Stanley. "We shall not start for a week, and you can pay her a couple more visits during that interval, so as to ascertain how she goes on."

"We will come again on the day after to-morrow, and at the same time," said Mr. Newton.

They then took leave, and the servants

in attendance were struck by their grave expression, as they proceeded to their carriages.

When Mildred returned to her own room, she found Sister Aline and Rose waiting for her.

"What has been decided on?" said Rose, eagerly.

"They have given a very reluctant assent to my departure to Nice," replied Mildred.

"That I fully expected. They wanted to keep you here."

"But what do they think of your case?" asked Sister Aline.

"Very badly, I believe," replied Mildred. "They scarcely gave me any hopes."

"Never mind! Keep up your spirits!" cried Rose. "I believe you will disappoint them both."

"I have very poor hopes of recovery," said Mildred. "I felt so ill just now, when I was under examination by the medical men, that I thought I should have died. They may come again, but I won't see them."

"Why not?" asked Rose. "I'm sure they would cure you, if they could."

"Perhaps so," rejoined Mildred. "But they cannot."

Just then, Stanley entered the room.

"I want you to take a short walk with me in the garden," he said.

"It must be a very short walk," she replied, "for I have not much strength left."

Taking his arm, she descended the back stairs, and went with him into the garden.

Evidently he had something important to say to her, but he hesitated to say it.

"I am going to ask you a very serious question," he said. "Forgive me if I am wrong, but it is important I should know the exact truth. Something I overheard said by the medical men just now awakened suspicions which I myself once entertained."

She became as pale as death, and trembled in every limb.

"Let us sit down," he rejoined. "Your strength is failing you."

He led her to a bench as quickly as he could. As soon as she was seated she caught hold of his arm, and looking as if she would penetrate to his soul, said:

"Now tell me what you suspected."

Stanley answered in a low, but distinct voice:

"Forgive me, if I was wrong. But I suspected you had taken poison—or, rather, I thought that poison had been given you—slow poison. I afterwards dismissed this opinion, but it has just been revived by the remarks of the medical men."

"What did they say?" she asked.

"These were Dr. Baguley's exact words," replied Stanley: "'I am convinced she is suffering from the effects of slow poison.' 'It looks like it, I own,' replied the other. 'But it cannot possibly be.'"

"Doctor Baguley was right," said Mildred, in tones of the deepest remorse. "I *am* suffering from the effects of poison—poison self-administered—but it failed in its object, and has left me, as you see, to a miserable existence."

"Gracious Heaven! Is it possible?" exclaimed Stanley, with a deep groan.

Mildred made no reply—her senses forsook her, and she fell back, utterly unconscious, on the bench.

Stanley did not call for assistance, nor did he attempt to restore her, but watched by her side for nearly half an hour, when she revived.

At first she was greatly confused, but she soon recovered sufficiently to be able to re-enter the house with her husband's support, and was delivered over by him to Sister Aline's tender care.

VII.

ANOTHER MEDICAL CONSULTATION.

According to appointment, on the second day after their visit, Dr. Baguley and Mr. Newton came again to Beaucliffe, and were received by Stanley in the library.

After the butler had left the room, Stanley, who had not answered their inquiries as to his wife's health very satisfactorily, said, "I have now an explanation to give you, gentlemen, in reference to her case, with which I could not furnish you on the previous occasion, as I was wholly unacquainted with it myself. As I am sure you will not desire me to enter into any needless details I will only remind you that

my wife eloped with Captain Darcy, and being subsequently struck with remorse at the step taken, returned to her father's house, and was most kindly received by him. Subsequently, a meeting took place at Dieppe between Darcy and myself, whereat my injured honour was fully avenged, and I learned at the same time that my unhappy wife was not so guilty as I supposed."

No remark was made by the medical men, and after a momentary pause Stanley went on.

"Ever since her return the fugitive had been suffering in her health and was almost in a dying state, but this seemed accounted for by the severe mental anguish she endured, and she positively refused all medical aid. At one time, I confess, I suspected she had taken poison, but I afterwards changed my opinion."

"You were right, nevertheless," remarked Dr. Baguley. "Mr. Newton and myself are agreed in opinion on that point, and we fear that although the drug was

not potent enough to kill, it has produced a permanently injurious effect upon the system."

"After your departure the other day," said Stanley, "my former suspicions revived, and I resolved to ascertain the truth. I therefore questioned her directly as to the point, and she confessed that goaded by remorse at her conduct, she had taken poison, but the dose was not sufficient to do its work effectually."

"I felt sure I could not be mistaken," said Dr. Baguley. "The moment I looked at her, I saw the effects of a slow poison in her countenance. I am afraid, Mr. Brereton, she will never be cured."

"She does not expect it herself, sir," replied Stanley. "Her sole anxiety is that her secret should not become known to her father, as she would not inflict further pain upon him. I must therefore beg you to be careful."

Both gave him an assurance to that effect.

"I sincerely pity you, Mr. Brereton,"

said Dr. Baguley, "but I pity your excellent father-in-law still more. Never was man prouder of his daughter. Deeming her perfection, he must have been dreadfully mortified by her elopement, and were he now to learn that she has finished the affair by taking poison, I know not what would not happen to him. But we must hear the truth from her own lips, in order to certify it if needful."

"You shall," replied Stanley. "I will bring her to you presently."

On quitting the room, his first step was to direct Glossop to prevent the squire from coming in till the examination was over.

He then went in search of Mildred, and returned with her immediately.

Both medical men regarded her compassionately as she entered the library.

She had now quite recovered her self-possession, and declared that at a time of great excitement she had swallowed the contents of a small phial, which had been procured for her as poison, but which had

failed in its effect, though it had gradually destroyed her health.

A memorandum of this confession was made by Dr. Baguley, which she signed.

As soon as this was done, the doctors said they felt very greatly for her distress, and would not detain her a moment longer than necessary.

Thanking them deeply for their consideration, she withdrew immediately with her husband.

VIII.

NICE.

THE party did not travel very expeditiously, and more than a week elapsed before they arrived at Nice.

A complete suite of rooms had been ordered for them at the Victoria—a large, modern hotel, charmingly situated on the beach, at the west end of the town, and commanding a supurb view of the blue and sparkling Mediterranean.

Enchanted with the place, which, with its parades, public buildings, gardens and gay shops, more than realised any notions she had formed of it, Mildred felt quite exhilarated; and tried to persuade herself

that her journey south had already done her a world of good. She told Sister Aline and Georgette, who were constantly with her, that she felt certain she should be quite well in a month. Whatever they thought they did not contradict her.

The heat was greater than she expected, it is true; but the sun's fiercest rays were carefully excluded, and towards evening there was a cool and most refreshing sea-breeze, which was allowed full admittance.

The whole suite of rooms belonging to the party looked upon the Mediterranean, and comprehended a charming salon, where all could meet.

Georgette, who was required to be always at hand, had a small room, communicating with her mistress's chamber, and Sister Aline was placed in an adjoining apartment. Lady Talmash and Rose had most agreeable rooms. They dined with Stanley at the table d'hôte, which was admirably served, but the others preferred the privacy of their own salon.

The arrival of the party had caused some-

what of a sensation among the guests, and much curiosity was manifested to see them at the dinner.

Both ladies were greatly admired, and several young men contrived to be presented to them; but they retired early.

Next day, Dr. Travis, an eminent physician of Nice, called on Mildred, in compliance with an appointment made by Stanley, and seemed to take a hopeful view of her case, but recommended great care.

Subsequently she walked out with Stanley, attended by Sister Aline and Georgette, and visited the Jardin Public and the Corso.

While they were thus occupied, Lady Talmash and Rose sought the parade leading to the port, and were joined by some of the acquaintances they had formed overnight.

Rose was a good deal annoyed by the pertinacity with which these idlers followed them about, but Lady Talmash—to the surprise of her companion—seemed to give them great encouragement.

Later on, the two parties met at the Café Américain on the Corso, where capital ices were served, and where all the visitors were anxious to obtain a glimpse of Mildred and Sister Aline, about whom there seemed something extremely mysterious.

Gladly would Stanley have shaken off the crowd of admirers that Lady Talmash had gathered round her, but he found it impossible. However, he privately counselled Rose to join his wife, and she did so.

Though she could not enter into its gaieties, Mildred was enchanted with Nice, and congratulated herself on having come there. The climate seemed to suit her, and her spirits were decidedly better. She could not take sea-baths, but she could inhale sea-breezes, and they did her an immense deal of good. She rejected everything she had heard to the disadvantage of Nice, and thought only of its charms.

She had now been there more than a fortnight, and had discovered some new beauty every day. No mistral had blown since her arrival, only the softest breezes,

that scarcely ruffled the surface of the placid sea. She could look out for ever upon it, and on the bustling port that afforded her endless amusement, and was only compelled by the unsupportable heat to shut out the view.

She could not have had a better attendant than Georgette, who enjoyed Nice as much as herself—even more, perhaps—for she not only gazed at the blue Mediterranean, but plunged into it every morning. The devoted soubrette declared that she had never known the real pleasure of bathing till she came to Nice.

Sister Aline did not bathe, but she was charmed by the sea view, and the climate suited her, so that she had no complaint to make. She constantly spoke to Dr. Travis about his patient, but could elicit no decided opinion from him, except that he seemed to think her slightly improving.

All the ladies, including Georgette, had been to the Place St. Dominique to provide themselves with the straw hats for which

Tori et Fils are famous, and which enabled them to resist the sun's rays.

During the period we have referred to, Lady Talmash and Rose had familiarised themselves with all the attractions of the place. Each morn, at a very early hour, they dipped in the Mediterranean, to the great improvement of their health and complexion, and Stanley followed their example.

But there is plenty to be seen at Nice, and it was not neglected.

The cathedral was visited, the Promenade des Anglais, the Ponchettes, the quay near the Croix de Marbre, the promenades, the squares, the shops, the gardens. Nothing was omitted.

Stanley, and the ladies under his charge, dined regularly at the table d'hôte. Rose formed as few new acquaintances as she could help, but still their number constantly increased, and she now seemed to know a great many pleasant people.

Lady Talmash had a particular friend, whose attention to her became so marked

and exclusive that he had driven all other suitors away.

Influenced by some report he had heard, Stanley thought it necessary to caution her ladyship against her admirer, but she turned a deaf ear to his warnings.

The gentleman in question, Mr. Charles Kynaston, belonged to a very good Yorkshire family, being the younger brother of a baronet, and was reported to have a thousand a year, if not more. Remarkably handsome, with very gentleman-like and prepossessing manners, about thirty, he had many good points in his favour.

But he had one fault, that counterbalanced all his merits—he was strongly addicted to play. Moreover, it was asserted that he had lost considerably.

Under these circumstances, Stanley had deemed it his duty to caution Lady Talmash—but his counsel, as we have said, was not very well received.

It is quite certain that Charles Kynaston was informed of Stanley's officious conduct,

but instead of resenting it he became more friendly with him than before.

He complained of his ill-luck, frankly confessed that he had gone further than he ought, and declared he would never play so deeply again.

What could he do more? Stanley fully believed him, and they became great friends.

Another week went by, during which Charles Kynaston became more devoted than ever to Lady Talmash, but Stanley began to fear—from stories that were told him—that he did not keep his promise to abstain from play so strictly as he ought to have done.

IX.

CHARLES KYNASTON.

The next thing Stanley heard was, that Charles Kynaston, who seemed to have been meditating some *coup*, had gone to Mentone. Lady Talmash was visibly depressed by his departure, though he had positively assured her he should return in a few days.

Stanley was told that the real motive of his visit to Mentone was to repair his fortunes at the gaming tables there, and on receiving this information he immediately sought an interview with her ladyship.

She looked dreadfully depressed, and scarcely answered Stanley's inquiries.

"I don't understand why he should go to Mentone," observed Stanley. "If he must play why couldn't he remain here?"

"Because he wished to meet a fresh set," replied Lady Talmash. "Besides, I dare say he had other motives."

"I quite relied upon his promise to play no more," said Stanley, "but I believe he has broken it, and now I find he has moved off to new ground. Dear Lady Talmash, you really must give him up. He is an incorrigible gambler."

"I know it," she replied, in an agony of distress. "But I cannot give him up."

"Cannot give him up;—why not?" said Stanley, regarding her in astonishment.

"I know you will blame me when I tell you—very properly so——"

"Never mind. What have you done?"

"I have lent him a large sum of money—a very large sum of money—and I cannot get rid of him till he pays me."

"Great Heavens! Did I hear aright?" cried Stanley, in increased surprise. "How much *have* you lent him?"

After some hesitation, she said, "Two thousand pounds."

"What!" exclaimed Stanley, "you have lent this gambler and adventurer two thousand pounds? I would not have believed you capable of such imprudence unless your ladyship had told me so yourself. You will never get back a shilling of the money."

"I fear not," she gasped. "As soon as the money arrived from my London bankers, I handed it over to Charles, and he swore to repay me within three days. This is the third day. I fear it will all be lost at the gaming tables at Mentone."

"I fear so too. I wish your ladyship had consulted me. I would have advised you to act very differently. Still there may be a hope of recovery. You are not certain he has lost the money?"

"No, but I have a strong presentiment of it. Had he been lucky, he would assuredly have let me know."

"But there is a possibility that he might have won."

"Yes, there is just a chance. But it is so slight that I have no belief in it."

"Dear Lady Talmash," said Stanley, "would you like me to go to Mentone as your representative, and try and force him to give up the money? If you desire it, I will."

Lady Talmash, however, did not seem inclined to resort to this extreme measure, and declined to give Stanley sufficient authority to demand the money, so that he hesitated to undertake the errand.

While they were giving the matter further consideration, Charles Kynaston himself entered the room, his joyous aspect showing he had been lucky.

Rushing up to Lady Talmash, he threw himself at her feet, and offering her a small portefeuille, said, "In that pocket-book your ladyship will find bills and notes to the amount you have lent me. Never was I happier than I am in being able to return the money to you. Take it, pray take it."

But Lady Talmash was quite overcome by emotion, and could not comply.

"Don't disappoint him!" said Stanley. "Sir, I applaud your honourable purpose," he added to Charles Kynaston.

"Open the pocket-book, I beg of you, Mr. Brereton," said Kynaston, rising and turning to him, "and satisfy yourself that it really contains the amount I have stated."

"I will take your word for it, Mr. Kynaston," replied Stanley. "I am quite sure it does."

"Give it me, then," cried Lady Talmash, taking the portefeuille; "and accept my very best thanks."

"Nay, thanks are due from me," said Kynaston, earnestly. "You have indeed greatly served me, and obliged me in a manner I shall never forget."

"And you have behaved in a most honourable manner, Charles," said Lady Talmash; "and have quite restored yourself to my good opinion."

"And mine," added Stanley.

"I am rejoiced to hear it," said Kynaston. "I always meant to act honourably. Fortune, at last, has favoured me. I have

won three thousand pounds—two-thirds of which I have returned to you. And now hear what I have to say further. Never again will I touch card or dice—never! This I solemnly swear!"

Both looked at him as he uttered the vow, and felt sure he was in earnest.

"Keep that vow, and you will do well," said Stanley.

"You make me feel quite happy," said Lady Talmash.

Reports of Charles Kynaston's extraordinary good luck soon reached the salons at Nice, and warm congratulatious were offered him, for he was generally liked; but persons thought he would not keep the money long, and told him so.

"Oh! yes, I shall," he replied. "I have given up play."

"Since when?" they asked, incredulously.

"Since my return from Mentone," he replied.

People laughed at this assertion, and nobody believed it. But it proved correct.

X.

SIR RANDAL DE BLUNDEVILLE AND MARSTON MALPAS ARRIVE AT NICE.

About this time, two of our former acquaintances, Sir Randal de Blundeville and Mr. Marston Malpas, arrived at Nice and took up their quarters at the Victoria.

They had been making a tour in Switzerland and the North of Italy, and hearing that Stanley and his party were staying at Nice they resolved to make a halt there.

Owing to a variety of circumstances, Stanley had not seen so much of Sir Randal as he desired, and was very glad to meet him again.

Sir Randal's stately manner was well calculated to produce an impression upon

the visitors at the hotel, and his appearance at the table d'hôte caused many inquiries to be made about him and his gay friend, which were answered in a very satisfactory manner by Stanley. As an old friend of Lady Talmash, he sat near her on the day of his arrival, and paid her a great deal of attention, while Marston Malpas, who beheld Rose for the first time, was quite captivated by her.

Sir Randal made many anxious inquiries about Mrs. Stanley Brereton, and was much concerned to learn the precarious state of her health from Lady Talmash.

"She is certainly better than when we left Beaucliffe," said her ladyship; "but I do not think her entirely out of danger. However, you will, no doubt, see her to-morrow, and will be able to judge for yourself."

"I sincerely pity my worthy friend, Mr. Warburton," said Sir Randal. "The daughter, whom he doated on, has been nothing but a source of the greatest anxiety to him."

"Quite true, Sir Randal," replied her

ladyship; "and no one knows what he has gone through better than myself."

"By-the-by, the last piece of news I heard respecting him was that he was about to marry Lady Starkey," said Sir Randal. "Is it true?"

"Perfectly true, and the marriage may take place at any time, for they won't wait for our return."

"Surprising! I could not have believed it. But perhaps, under the circumstances, it was the best thing he could do."

"Decidedly," said Lady Talmash. "He was almost heart-broken. Lady Starkey will make him a capital wife, and keep up Beaucliffe properly. I consider Mr. Warburton very lucky. Few elderly gentlemen have such a chance."

"Well, he deserves his good fortune, for he is a most excellent fellow," said Sir Randal.

While this conversation was going on, a very lively discourse took place between Marston Malpas and Rose. Thinking what he said would be agreeable to Stanley, the

young gentleman told him how much he was struck by Rose's beauty, and how fortunate he esteemed himself in meeting her.

Stanley laughed, but was not altogether pleased — particularly when he perceived that Rose did not seem entirely indifferent to Malpas's attentions.

"What do you think of your neighbour," he said to her, as they left the salle-à-manger.

"I think him very agreeable," she replied. "I am delighted that he and Sir Randal have come here."

"I thought you had plenty of society?"

"But these are both very agreeable people," she replied. "Everybody seemed struck by Sir Randal, and I really think Mr. Marston Malpas a great acquisition."

"I see nothing in him," said Stanley, in a disparaging tone.

"Surely you must admit that he talks very agreeably. I have promised him a place next me at dinner to-morrow."

"You have!"

"Don't blame me; I couldn't very well refuse."

Next morning Sir Randal sought an interview with Mildred, and was quite shocked by the great change in her appearance. He could scarcely believe it was the lovely girl he had formerly known, and not without difficulty repressed his feelings.

"You find me much changed, I perceive," she said. "Nay, do not attempt to deny it; your looks confess the truth."

"You certainly do not look so well as when I last saw you at Beaucliffe," he replied. "But I understand you are much better since you came to Nice?"

"Yes," she replied. "I don't think I should be alive had I remained at home. But I have now some hopes of recovery."

"You have every opportunity that a salubrious place and fine climate can offer you. Ah! when I think how beautiful you were, and how full of health, I can scarcely believe in the change!"

"It is all my own fault, dear Sir Randal," she replied. "You have seen me on horseback with the hounds, you have seen me engaged at lawn tennis, and at other games,

and know that my health and spirits were good. But I took no care of myself—none whatever — and have suffered in consequence."

"I won't blame you, my dear lady," he replied, "but I am sincerely sorry, for you deserve a better fate."

"Don't frighten her, Sir Randal," said Stanley. "Our physician, who is a very able man, assures me she will recover. You should have seen her when she first came here."

"I saw her a year ago. I saw her when she was Mildred Warburton, the loveliest girl in Cheshire, ay, in England, and I cannot help contrasting her present appearance with her former charming looks."

"That is scarcely fair, Sir Randal," said Mildred.

"At all events, it shows the strong impression you produced upon me," he replied. "And I hope to see you completely restored to your former beauty."

"In my opinion, there is more real interest in your present delicate looks than in your former dazzling beauty," said Stanley.

A gentle smile, that lighted up her pallid features, thanked him for the compliment.

"Well, you have a blooming beauty in your party," said Sir Randal. "She is aptly named Rose. My young friend, Marston Malpas, has quite lost his heart to her."

"Rose Hylton is very amiable, as well as a very pretty girl," said Mildred. "I suppose you are aware she is Lady Starkey's niece, Sir Randal?"

"Yes, I have heard so."

"She deserves a good husband," continued Mildred. "She has no particular fortune of her own, but her aunt means to give her a handsome marriage portion."

"Should young Malpas propose to her, as I think he will," said Sir Randal, "a marriage portion will not be required, since he is very well off."

"But it can do no harm, and will make Rose feel more independent," said Mildred.

"You are speculating on what may never take place," said Stanley. "Mr. Malpas only met the young lady at the table d'hôte yesterday."

"But he was quite smitten, as I have told you," said Sir Randal. "He spoke of the young lady to me in most rapturous terms, and is now in attendance upon her and Lady Talmash in the public promenades. I believe something will come of it."

"I sincerely hope it may," said Mildred. "She is really a very nice girl. Why, here they are, I declare, on their return from the walk!" she added, as Lady Talmash and Rose, attended by Charles Kynaston and Marston Malpas, entered the salon.

The whole party seemed in high spirits, especially Rose.

"Well, have you had a pleasant promenade?" inquired Mildred.

"Delightful," replied Rose. "I never enjoyed anything so much."

"I had no idea Nice was such an enchanting place," said Malpas. "We have seen nothing like it on our tour."

"Come, that's rather strong," said Sir Randal. "But you have had agreeable society, and that accounts for it."

"Yes, there may be something in that," said Malpas, with a glance at Rose.

Malpas, who had not yet been presented to Mildred, was now made known to her, and very graciously received. But Stanley treated him rather haughtily. Lady Talmash took the opportunity of introducing Charles Kynaston to Sir Randal, and the formal old baronet, who knew his brother Sir Mowbray, received him very cordially.

An animated conversation ensued, in which everybody took part except Stanley, who was at length aroused from his seeming apathy by a telegraph message from England, brought him by one of the attendants.

"This is news in which most of us are interested," he said, after perusing the despatch, "so I will communicate it to you without delay."

"I can guess the news before you read it," said Lady Talmash. "It is to announce the approaching marriage of Lady Starkey with Mr. Warburton."

"The nuptials took place yesterday at Beaucliffe, and quite privately," replied Stanley.

"The happy pair have my best wishes," said Lady Talmash.

"And mine," cried Sir Randal. "I repeat what I have often said, that a better fellow does not exist than the squire, and I sincerely wish him all happiness."

"I am delighted to hear you speak of dear papa in such terms, Sir Randal," said Mildred. "I feel quite certain Lady Starkey will make him happy."

"And so am I," said Rose. "I only wish I could congratulate them both in person."

"I ought to have told you," said Stanley, "that the telegram I have just received is from my mother. No one, it seems, was present on the occasion but herself and Sir John Lambert."

"I always understood that Mr. Warburton was quite resolved that the wedding should be strictly private, whether it took place at St. George's, Hanover-square, as Lady Starkey desired, or at Beaucliffe," said Lady Talmash. "Sir John Lambert is Lady Starkey's oldest and best friend."

"And a better friend she could not have,'

said Sir Randal. "I am very glad he was present on the occasion. Would I had been there myself!"

"You ought to have been, dear Sir Randal," said Mildred, regarding him affectionately. "But I suppose papa knew you were on the Continent?"

"Very likely," said Sir Randal. "But though the hospitable squire gave no sumptuous wedding breakfast, I'll be bound he provided a most liberal entertainment to his tenants and retainers."

"You are right, Sir Randall," said Stanley. "My telegram informs me that he did so."

Soon after this the whole of the party went out for a walk—most of them proceeding to the Corso—while Stanley and his wife, attended by Sister Aline and Georgette, found their way to the Jardin Public.

XI.

THE COMTE DE CLAIRVAUX ARRIVES AT NICE.

NEXT day, the party at the Victoria received a fresh and very welcome addition in the Comte de Clairvaux, who came from Mentone, where he had been staying with a friend at a beautiful villa near the sea.

The comte had heard that Stanley was at Nice, and very soon found him out, and engaged rooms at the same hotel. Of course, he was presented to Mildred by her husband, and like every one else, who beheld her for the first time, he was struck by the extreme delicacy of her appearance, and thought her in a rapid decline.

But the person who interested the comte

most, and whom he had not expected to meet, was Sister Aline. Almost immediately on his arrival he met Georgette, and learning from her that her former mistress was an inmate of the hotel, he sent word that he would pay her an early visit.

Sister Aline was very glad to see the comte, and displayed more cheerfulness than usual.

"I did not expect to find you here, dear sister," he said. "I thought you rarely quitted the religious retreat at Dieppe."

"I came to attend poor Mrs. Stanley Brereton, for whom I have the greatest affection, and who is here for the benefit of her health," she replied.

"I have just seen her," replied the comte, shaking his head, "and frankly confess I despair of her recovery."

"She is certainly better than when she left Beaucliffe. Heaven grant her restoration may be complete."

The comte did not attempt to offer much encouragement, but inquired if there were any of his friends among the party.

"There is Lady Talmash, who is thought

very charming," said Sister Aline, "and Rose Hylton, who is unquestionably very pretty. Amongst the gentlemen, there is Sir Randal de Blundeville, a friend of poor Sir Thomas Starkey, whom I am certain you will like."

"I already know him, and like him much," replied the comte. "He is a very distinguished person."

"There are others, but it is not necessary to mention them," said Sister Aline.

"Sir Randal will suffice," replied the comte, rising to depart. "With your permission, and if I shall not interrupt your devotions, I will pay you a short daily visit."

"I shall be very glad to see you," she replied.

And the comte quitted the room.

As he descended to the large morning-room, he found Sir Randal, who had heard of his arrival, and was delighted to meet him.

"How fortunate I am in finding you here, Sir Randal," he said.

"Not more fortunate than I am in meet-

ing you, comte," replied the other. "I hope we shall be able to offer you some amusement."

"No doubt of it," replied the comte. "The place seems very gay. I have already met several friends since my arrival, and am pretty certain to meet many more."

"You cannot fail. The Comte de Clairvaux is popular everywhere."

"You are excessively obliging, Sir Randal," replied the other, bowing.

While they were thus conversing, Lady Talmash and Rose, evidently prepared for a walk, entered the salon, and the comte was presented to them. He thought both very good-looking, but was particularly pleased with Lady Talmash, and immediately devoted himself to her.

"With your permission I will attend you in your walk," he said.

"Nothing will afford us greater pleasure," replied her ladyship, charmed with his manner, and delighted with the opportunity of showing him off.

Accordingly, they proceeded to the parade, the comte placing himself in atten-

dance upon her ladyship, who had not miscalculated the effect she was likely to produce when thus escorted. There was something in the Comte de Cairvaux's high-bred manner that proclaimed him a person of distinction, and many eyes followed him as he moved slowly along with his brilliant companion.

Nor was Sir Randal's stately deportment less effective in its way, though totally different, and unmistakably English. The contrast between the two gentlemen was very striking, and could not fail to attract attention, and Rose had as much reason to be vain of the complimentary remarks she overheard as her charming friend.

They were followed at some distance by Charles Kynaston and Marston Malpas, who did not like to join them, not feeling sure they should be welcome, but who witnessed the sensation produced, and heard some of the compliments paid them.

But ere long a meeting took place between the great personages who marched first, and Stanley and his wife, who were

returning from a short walk, which Mildred had greatly enjoyed.

During this halt the "belle poitrinaire," as she was styled by the beholders, was as much admired as her blooming friends, and the greatest interest was expressed for her.

XII.

MR. WARBURTON AND LADY STARKEY ARRIVE AT NICE.

The great attention paid by the Comte de Clairvaux to Lady Talmash, and the preference shown by her ladyship for the comte's society, could not fail to excite Charles Kynaston's jealousy; and when the same thing went on next day, he thought himself justified in remonstrating with her. But he did so with great good humour.

"You are so monopolised by this gallant Frenchman that I have scarcely an opportunity of speaking to you now," he said. "He walks about with you all day—sits next you at the table d'hôte—conducts you to the Salle de Conversation, and never thinks of leaving you for the rest of the

day. The same thing goes on in the evening, and I find he has taken a box for you and Rose at the opera to-night."

"You cannot complain of that," she interrupted, "since you yourself have a seat."

"I would rather not be obliged to him," he rejoined.

"Nonsense!" she cried. "All the other gentlemen are going. This is only the comte's gallantry."

"He is too attentive by half. My friends laugh at me. Even Stanley Brereton tells me I am clearly cut out."

"Never mind what Stanley says. You know better. But don't exhibit yourself in this absurd character. I've the greatest horror of a jealous man. Besides, you've no cause for jealousy. It's pleasant, don't you see, to be attended upon by a man of distinction like the Comte de Clairvaux."

"Since you say so, that's quite enough," he rejoined. "You shan't hear any further complaints from me."

So the whole of the party went to the Théâtre Italien that evening, as arranged. Lady Talmash and Rose sat in front, and

were objects of general admiration. The comte and Sir Randal were behind them, and the rest of the gentlemen occupied the back of the box. Both Charles Kynaston and Marston Malpas wished to come forward, but were not allowed.

On the following evening, the same party attended a concert at the Cercle de la Méditerraneé, for which Sir Randal provided tickets; and on the third night, they all appeared at a ball at the same Cercle, which turned out a very brilliant affair.

It was scarcely to be expected that the Comte de Clairvaux would dance, but he yielded to Lady Talmash's persuasions, and stood up with her in a quadrille—Stanley, with Rose for a partner, forming their vis-à-vis. We ought to mention that the two ladies were allowed to be the belles of the room.

Of course, Mildred would not appear on any of these occasions; but her compulsory absence was no deprivation, for she had quite lost her taste for amusement and gaiety, and never went out in the evening, except for a short walk.

At this juncture she was quite unable to do so, for the mistral prevailed, and she had already felt its dire effects. Dr. Travis was in constant attendance upon her, and Sister Aline and Georgette took it in turns to watch by her couch at night, so that she was never left alone.

Heaven seemed to listen to the heartfelt prayers of the devoted friend who knelt beside her, for in the course of a week a decided change took place for the better, and as this baneful mistral had ceased to blow, her physician allowed her to venture forth again.

No persons were more rejoiced to behold her once more on the parade than Sir Randal and the Comte de Clairvaux.

As soon as he was satisfied that Mildred was out of danger, Stanley telegraphed the good news to her father, and received a prompt response, showing how much the warm-hearted old gentleman was pleased by the joyful intelligence.

Lady Starkey—for she chose to retain her former title—wrote at the same time to

Rose and Lady Talmash to say that if Mildred had a relapse, they would start for Nice at once, as Mr. Warburton would never feel happy again if he did not embrace his daughter once more.

Answers were immediately sent, calculated to allay the old gentleman's fears, but having seriously contemplated the journey, he resolved to carry it out, and her ladyship prepared to accompany him. However, he resolved not to mention his design beforehand, but to take them by surprise.

One fine day, about a week after Mildred's restoration, a *chaise de poste* arrived at the Victoria, the two occupants of which were attended by a courier and a lady's-maid. The former, who appeared to act as valet, made some inquiries about rooms, which were immediately and satisfactorily answered.

A robust elderly gentleman, whose appearance proclaimed him an Englishman, descended from the voiture, and had scarcely set foot on the ground, when a cry of delight was heard, and a lady rushed

forward, and flung her arms round his neck.

Mildred, who had been standing at the entrance of the hotel with her husband, had discovered her father. At the same moment, Stanley had been made aware of Lady Starkey's arrival, and hastened to greet her.

When Mr. Warburton perceived the sudden change in his daughter's looks he regretted he had taken her by surprise. But, fortunately, no harm was done, and they quickly entered the hotel, where they could converse in private.

Lady Starkey then explained that they had accomplished the long journey very satisfactorily, and had seen a great deal. They had travelled from Paris to Marseilles by rail and performed the latter part of the journey by post. It might have been accomplished more expeditiously but not more agreeably. Mr. Warburton could scarcely find words to express his delight in beholding his daughter again, and left the talking to Lady Starkey, but it could

be seen that he was deeply moved. The meeting was not interrupted, and half an hour flew by before Stanley went in quest of Lady Talmash and Rose, who were filled with pleasurable surprise.

Altogether, the meeting was a most joyful one, and made the new-comers ample amends for their long and somewhat fatiguing journey.

The squire was also much gratified to find his old friend Sir Randal at the hotel, and both he and Lady Starkey were delighted to make the acquaintance of the Comte de Clairvaux, whom they well knew by reputation.

All necessary arrangements had been entrusted to the clever courier, by whom charming apartments, commanding a view of the Mediterranean, were provided, and plenty of time was left the squire and his wife to take a walk with Mildred on the Promenade des Anglais before dinner.

XIII.

MR. WARBURTON AND LADY STARKEY AT NICE.

Mr. Warburton and Lady Starkey were charmed with Nice. It surpassed all their expectations, and they were never tired of the promenade near the blue Mediterranean.

The society at the hotel exactly suited them, and they did not care to increase it by any new acquaintances. They met Sister Aline in Mildred's room. But the party that met together each day on the parade in the public gardens was now very strong, and needed no additions, though new-comers were always anxious to join it, but the comte and Sir Randal took its direction upon themselves, and prevented its increase.

It was now quite clear that the comte had begun to entertain a tender feeling for Lady Talmash, and notwithstanding her assurances to the contrary to Charles Kynaston, she seemed to give her new admirer every encouragement. He was always with her, and it is quite certain she could have dismissed him at a moment's notice, if she had been so inclined. But though Charles Kynaston gave her repeated hints, she never attended to them. She had now become identified with the Comte by the *grand monde* at Nice, and didn't care for giving him up.

Sir Randal, though he proceeded in a much quieter manner, had likewise gained the reputation of a man of gallantry. Several ladies threw out lures to him, but without success. He was not to be captured easily.

Now that her aunt had arrived, Rose was obliged to spend much more time with her, and less with Marston Malpas. But this she did not regret, as she had become rather tired of Malpas.

Mr. Warburton devoted himself to his

daughter, for whom all his former affection seemed to be revived.

Feeling he should soon be separated from her—perhaps, for ever—he spent as much time as possible in her society, and was pleased and surprised at the change that had taken place in her opinions. The daily discourse that took place between him and Sister Aline seemed to do him a great deal of good, and he tried to treasure what he heard in his memory, as he felt it would be a great comfort to reflect upon it hereafter.

"I hope you are happy here, my dear child?" he said to Mildred one day.

"Perfectly happy, dearest papa," she replied, regarding him with eyes full of affection. "I am so thankful you have come to see me."

"Yes, dear Mr. Warburton," remarked Sister Aline, "you may rest satisfied that your warm parental regard is fully appreciated. At one time I was afraid you would not see your daughter again."

"Heaven has listened to my prayer, and I am truly grateful," he replied, earnestly.

"I hope you won't leave me soon now you have come," said Mildred. "Your presence is an inconceivable comfort to me."

"I will stay with you as long as I can, depend upon it," replied her father. "And I want no inducement to do so, for I think Nice a most delightful place."

"But you do not enjoy it sufficiently," said Mildred. "You ought to pass more of your time on the promenade or in the Jardin Public."

"If you could go out, I would accompany you," he replied. "As it is, I prefer being with you here."

Just then Georgette announced the Comte de Clairvaux, and the next moment that distinguished personage entered and bowed to the company. He conducted his discourse in English, as he fancied the squire would like it best, and he was right.

He had not been long in the room when he began to sing the praises of Lady Talmash, and spoke of her in rapturous terms.

"Are you aware, Monsieur le Comte,

that her ladyship is engaged?" observed Sister Aline.

"To whom?" he rejoined, astounded.

"To Mr. Charles Kynaston. I believe I am correct?" she said, appealing to Mildred.

"No doubt about it," rejoined the other. "She told me so herself."

"Diable!" exclaimed the comte. "I wonder she didn't tell *me*."

"Possibly she may give you the preference after all, comte," said the squire, laughing. "It seems as if she meant it."

"I hope she may," rejoined the comte. "I don't doubt what I am told, but I should never have guessed it. I don't think her ladyship has spoken a dozen words to Mr. Kynaston since I have been here. Very likely she is tired of him."

"I'll tell you what to do," said the squire, who seemed in a jesting mood. "You shall play with him for her."

"Quite impossible, papa," said Mildred. "Are you not aware that Charles Kynaston has forsworn cards and dice?"

"How long ago?" asked the comte.

"Since he won a large sum at Mentone," repeated Mildred.

"Then he will soon break his vow," said the comte. "But I fancy I hear a well-known voice without."

As he spoke the door was opened by Georgette, and Lady Talmash entered, followed by Charles Kynaston and Stanley. Her ladyship seemed enchanted to find the comte, and accepted the chair he offered her, after shaking hands with Mildred and Sister Aline.

Stanley came forward, but Charles Kynaston soon found himself *de trop*.

In spite of the intelligence he had just received, the comte continued his attentions to her ladyship.

"I looked for you on the parade, but did not find you," he said.

"I cannot tell you how it happened," she replied. "I was certainly there, and should have been charmed to meet you."

"I saw the comte at a distance," remarked Charles Kynaston.

"Why didn't you tell me?" rejoined her ladyship rather sharply.

"I had no idea you wished to speak to him."

"I wished to do so particularly."

"Then I'm excessively sorry—pray forgive me."

But her ladyship refused to listen to him.

"I tell you what it is, Charley," whispered Stanley, "you've got a rival—a formidable rival."

"I won't stand it any longer," replied Kynaston, in the same tone. "I've had too much of it already. I'll speak to the comte at once."

"Don't," said Stanley, restraining him. "Take my advice, and leave things alone."

"S'death! shall I stand still, and see him carry her off?"

"Poh! he doesn't mean to carry her off," replied Stanley. "But you'll certainly lose her if you interfere."

"What would you have me do, then?"

"Submit," rejoined Stanley.

"Well, I'll try, but it will be hard work," replied the other.

Fancying from the young man's manner that he had withdrawn his pretensions to

her ladyship's hand, the comte felt quite easy.

But Charles Kynaston was not so indifferent as he seemed, and resolved to come to a speedy understanding with her ladyship.

It must be owned that it required a good deal of patience to bear calmly all the annoyances the young man had to put up with that morning, and though Stanley advised him to submit, he wondered he did so.

While paying his court to Lady Talmash, the comte found means to make himself generally agreeable.

A ball was given that night at the Cercle Massena, for which he had procured tickets, and these he distributed among the company.

Charles Kynaston seemed inclined to refuse, not wishing to be beholden to one whom he regarded as a rival, but a significant look from her ladyship made him alter his determination.

"I hope Lady Starkey and her niece will grace the ball with their presence," said the

comte to Mr. Warburton. "Perhaps it is too much to expect the pleasure of your company?"

"I never dance," replied the squire, laughing, "and should only be in the way, so you must be good enough to excuse me. I would rather spend the evening here."

"As you please," said the comte; "but it will be a very gay ball. Our friend, Sir Randal, has promised to attend it, with Mr. Marston Malpas."

"Ah! Sir Randal will continue gay to the last," said the squire; "my dancing days are over."

Soon after this the party separated, and several of them proceeded to the Promenade des Anglais, but the squire did not quit his daughter's room.

His affection for her had increased since his arrival at Nice, and he could not bear to be absent from her. Though he received satisfactory assurances from the physicians, he was full of uneasiness lest she should have another dangerous attack, and every possible care was taken to ward it off.

That night, when all the rest of the party

had gone to the ball, Mr. Warburton was seated with his daughter. They were alone, for Sister Aline had retired to her own room.

In reply to her father's inquiries as to her continued improvement, Mildred said:

"My improvement is very slow, dearest papa, and you must promise to take me home at once if I have a recurrence of those dangerous symptoms. Much as I like Nice, I don't wish to die here."

"Your wishes shall be attended to," he replied; "but I trust you may go back cured."

"Do not delude yourself, dearest papa; I shall never be perfectly cured."

And she then told him how she had swallowed poison, from the effects of which she had never recovered.

Mr. Warburton was greatly distressed by the narration.

"Heaven forgive you, my dear child, and spare you!" he exclaimed. "I know your repentance has been deep and sincere."

"And my breast is lighter than it was, but it is still heavily burdened. I cannot

bear to look back on the past. What a happy life I have thrown away!"

"You may still have a happy life, dear child," he said.

"Not unless I can purchase oblivion," she rejoined, almost in accents of despair. "In spite of all my efforts to repress them, the recollection of certain follies I have committed will rise before me and torment me. No, I do not desire to live long. I shall be best out of the way. But I pray for a tranquil end."

"And that you will have, rest assured, dear child," he said.

"You comfort me greatly," she replied. "My anticipations have been gloomy and despairing. But for good Sister Aline, who has likewise greatly comforted me, I should not be living now."

"Yes, you owe much to her," said Mr. Warburton.

"I owe everything," replied Mildred. "That which is far dearer to me than life—my chance of salvation."

"I rejoice to find you in such a frame of mind," said her father. "But I must

express a hope that you may long be spared."

"Wherefore?" she rejoined. "I repeat I am only in the way, and interfere with the happiness of others. Hear me, dearest papa. When I am gone, it is my wish that Stanley should marry Rose Hylton. She will make him an excellent wife, and the match will be agreeable to all."

"I cannot bear to contemplate such an event," said her father.

"Why not?" she asked.

"Because you must needs have left us before it can take place."

"What of that? You must lose me sooner or later."

"No more, or you will break my heart!" he cried, hurrying out of the room.

XIV.

MILDRED DESIRES TO LEAVE NICE.

A GOOD deal of amusement was going on at Nice at this time, and owing to the attention of the Comte de Clairvaux, Lady Talmash and the ladies of her party partook of it all.

Scarcely an evening passed on which something attractive did not take place—ball, concert, or opera—and all went to these entertainments except the squire. Lady Starkey was as gay as the rest, but declared she only acted as her niece's chaperon. The mornings were passed on the various promenades, and in the public gardens, or at pique-nique parties, and at such times the squire could be seen amid

the fashionable throng, but never in the evening.

But for Lady Starkey, it is probable Sir Randal de Blundeville would not have been found so frequently as he was at these reunions; but he liked her society, and her ladyship was pleased to have him with her.

Thus the time passed very pleasantly, and the same sort of thing might have gone on for a month or two longer, had it not been interrupted by Mildred's illness.

Again the ruthless mistral did the mischief, and inflicted a cold upon her, that alarmed everybody.

When she recovered, which she did by the constant attention and skilful treatment of Dr. Travis, she had a private talk with her father, and said to him:

"Now, dearest papa, I must remind you of your promise to take me back, in case Nice should fail to restore me. I am anxious to go, as I have a presentiment that the next attack will be fatal. I have said nothing on the subject to any one, except Sister Aline, who agrees with me as to the

danger, but advises me to stay here to the last. But I won't do that, if I can help it."

"You shall not be kept here against your wish, depend upon it, my dear child," said her father; "and I must own you do look very ill."

"I am convinced I have not long to live, papa, or I should not speak to you thus," she rejoined. "I have not mentioned my wish to Stanley, for several reasons—and I feel sure you will grant my last request."

"You are right, my dear child, I will," replied the squire. "Let Stanley remain here a month longer, if he likes."

"A month will be too long, papa," she rejoined. "All will be over by that time."

"Don't make yourself uneasy," he rejoined. "You shall start by the next steamer to Marseilles, and I will go with you, and take care of you."

"Oh, thank you, dearest papa," she cried. "Sister Aline and Georgette will look after me. The others can follow at their leisure."

"Yes, that will be the best plan," he rejoined. "But I wish to speak to Lady Starkey, and hear what she has to say."

"I know what she will say, papa. She won't like to be hurried. Nor will Lady Talmash—or Rose. Their gaiety must not be interrupted. Let me disappear."

"It shall be so," said her father. "With regard to the others it matters not. But have you no wish that Stanley should accompany you?"

"I am certain he would rather remain, and why tear him hence? I have shown myself selfish all my life, but now I will act otherwise."

Mr. Warburton regarded her with admiration.

"When do you think you will be ready to start on the homeward journey?" he asked.

"To-morrow," she replied. "Is that too soon?"

"Not for me," he rejoined. "But I don't think the steamer takes its departure for Marseilles till the day after. As the weather is so fine, I feel sure you will enjoy the little voyage, and I sincerely hope it may do you good."

"The plan you propose is charming,

papa," she replied, "and is infinitely preferable to the carriage of a vetturino. This very morning I was gazing on the blue Mediterranean, and thinking how much I should like a few hours on its waters—and now I shall have my wish."

"I will go at once and explain our plans to Lady Starkey," said her father. "I am sure she will approve of them, and I feel almost certain she will remain here a week or two longer. Make your own preparations for departure, and I will take care of all the rest."

"My preparations will be easily made, dear papa," she said, "and I again thank you most sincerely for so readily granting my request."

"Could you suppose I would refuse you anything?" he replied, regarding her with indescribable affection.

Just as he was about to take his departure, Sister Aline came in, attended by Georgette.

"Mildred has some news for you," he said. "I hope you will think it good news."

"I won't keep you in suspense," said Mildred, "and it concerns Georgette as well as you. Papa has kindly promised to take me back to Beaucliffe. We shall start by the next steamer to Marseilles."

"Delightful!" exclaimed the irrepressible Georgette.

"Knowing what you yourself desire, I rejoice at the information," said Sister Aline.

"Pray, let nothing be said about my approaching departure," said Mildred. "I don't wish it talked about, and no one will miss me."

"There you are greatly mistaken, my dear child," remarked the squire. "Many persons, of whom you know nothing, are greatly interested in you, and will be sorry when you are gone. You may console yourself with that reflection."

"Yes, I can assure you, madame," said Georgette; "there are many, many persons who constantly inquire after you."

"I did not suppose it possible," said Mildred; "but I am greatly obliged to them. Nice has been very kind to me, and I am

not insensible to the sympathy shown me. If I fly from the place at this moment, it is not that I have any complaint to make, but that I have tender recollections elsewhere, that draw me forcibly towards another spot. I yield to them, because they overpower me."

"Content you, my dear child, you will soon be back at Beaucliffe," said her father.

"Never again to leave it," she replied.

Tears sprang to the squire's eyes, and unable to control his emotion, he hastily quitted the room.

XV.

MILDRED QUITS NICE.

THE squire lost no time in acquainting Lady Starkey with Mildred's anxious desire to return, as well as the plan he had proposed to her, of which her ladyship entirely approved.

"As you yourself, as well as Sister Aline, will accompany the invalid, I do not think it will be necessary for Stanley to make one of the party, and in my opinion he had better stay and take charge of us."

"I had already arranged it so in my own mind, and am glad you entertain a similar opinion," rejoined the squire. "Stanley will be very useful to you, and those with you, while we do not require him."

"Either he or you must remain with us, that's certain," said her ladyship.

"Then the matter is settled, for I have promised Mildred to attend her," replied the squire.

When the plan was proposed to Stanley, he required very little persuasion to accede to it.

"If her father accompanies her, there can be no occasion for me, especially as she will have Sister Aline and Georgette with her. We can follow in a week or two. But the decision seems very sudden."

"Extremely sudden," replied Lady Starkey. "I cannot understand it; and except in a case of absolute necessity, I should be sorry to break up so pleasant a party."

"It may seem unkind in me not to accompany my wife," said Stanley; "and if I could be of any real service, I should not hesitate for a moment. But I am sure Mr. Warburton would not be pleased if I insisted on taking his place. Besides, to speak the truth, I don't think Mildred wants to have me with her."

"Possibly," replied her ladyship.

The announcement of Mr. Warburton's intended departure with his daughter and her friend caused some sensation, but much satisfaction was manifested when it was explained that all the other ladies, who contributed so much to the gaiety of the place, would remain. The Comte de Clairvaux vowed that if Lady Talmash took flight he would not be left behind; and Sir Randal made a similar declaration in regard to Lady Starkey. Now, everybody was satisfied.

But the greatest interest attached to Mildred, and as soon as it became known that she was about to leave Nice, a general expression of regret was heard, and when her slight figure was last visible on the parade, a hundred eyes followed it, and many persons stood still to gaze at her. She was walking with Stanley, who evidently suffered much himself.

The steamer for Marseilles took its departure from the port of Nice at noon on the third day after the decision had been taken by Mr. Warburton and his daughter to proceed by that course.

Nothing could be more favourable than

the weather. The sea was as smooth as glass, and tempted all those who gazed upon its blue expanse to a voyage.

Earlier in the morning, Mildred bade an affectionate farewell to all those friends who had come to take leave of her, very few of whom ever expected to behold her again. But when they expressed an earnest desire to accompany her to the steamer, and remain on board with her till the vessel started, she declined.

"I should not have strength for the parting, under such circumstances," she said. "I must bid you farewell here."

All the luggage had been taken on board, and Mr. Warburton followed with Sister Aline and Georgette. Only Mildred and Stanley were left. When it came to the last, Stanley deeply regretted that he had not insisted on accompanying his wife, but it was too late now to alter his determination.

Though Mildred had already taken leave of all her assembled friends — of Ladies Starkey and Talmash, of Rose, of Sir Randal, of the Comte de Clairvaux, of Charles Kynaston, and Marston Malpas—she had

another painful leave-taking to endure before her departure, and it was almost too much for her.

Almost in a fainting state she was placed in a close carriage by Stanley, and driven down to the port, where the splendid steamer was waiting to receive her passengers. Mildred had just strength enough left to get on board, but fainted before she could reach the cabin, and had to be placed on a seat, where she could be seen by the crowd who had come to witness her departure.

When she opened her eyes, they rested on the basin of Nice, surrounded by lofty habitations, intermingled with towers, and backed by gentle hills covered with olives and crowned by villas. Above all, on the left towered the grand pyramid of Mont Cau, the whole forming a superb picture, on which Mildred's eyes were fixed as long as it remained in sight.

But many other magnificent spectacles were presented to her as the vessel shaped its course over the blue and glassy Mediterranean.

XVI.

DOCTOR PERCIVAL.

Whoso has tracked the lovely coast bordering the Maritime Alps, need not be told of its incomparable beauty. Nothing more picturesque—nothing more enchanting can be imagined.

Such was Mildred's voyage from Nice to Marseilles. The weather was perfect. A gentle breeze, just sufficient to fill the latteen sails of some of the lesser craft that entered the harbour, but scarcely disturbed the placid surface of the Mediterranean, served to mitigate the heat.

The steamer, which seemed only to consult the wishes of those on board, kept as close as she could with safety to the lovely coast, and touched at several interesting

places — Antibes, Frejus, Saint Tropez, Hyères — where some of the passengers landed.

Screened from the rays of the sun by a thick awning, those on deck—and almost every one was on deck—enjoyed a multitude of magnificent views.

The vessel stopped for the night at Toulon, and started betimes next morning with several fresh passengers, for Marseilles, being favoured with the same exquisite weather.

Mildred, who fancied she felt better, and was in very good spirits, was greatly pleased by the appearance of the bustling and crowded seaport, filled with vessels of all nations, but was not sorry to be transferred to an excellent hotel in the Rue Canebière, where delightful apartments were given them.

The squire immediately telegraphed their safe arrival to Stanley, telling him they meant to rest for a couple of days at Marseilles, before starting for Paris.

A prompt response was received from Stanley, stating that he would join them at

Marseilles as soon as the railway could bring him there; and next morning they were not surprised, though greatly pleased, to see him at breakfast.

"This is exceedingly kind of you, Stanley," said the squire; "but I really did not mean to suggest it."

"Ever since Mildred's departure I have been wretched," cried Stanley; "and as an opportunity offered of spending a few hours with her, I determined to embrace it, and started at once for Marseilles."

"I am very glad you came, dear Stanley," said Mildred. "I had began to fancy I should never see you again, and you may therefore imagine what a satisfaction it is to have you here."

Her looks spoke more than her words, and touched him so much that he exclaimed:

"Only say the word, and I will go on with you to Beaucliffe."

"Oh! no, no! I won't be so exacting," she rejoined. "You have already done enough to prove your love for me. I don't require more. On your return to Nice,

you will be able to tell my dear friends that I am looking tolerably well — certainly better than when I left them. We had really a most splendid voyage—I never shall forget it—and I am sure it has done me infinite good."

"You look better," said Stanley. "Now tell me, dearest Mildred. You forbid me to go to Beaucliffe with you, but shall I accompany you to Paris? Would you like me with you?"

"Very much indeed," she replied.

"Then I'll go," he cried.

"But not further than Paris," said the squire. "You must return to Nice; they won't know what to do without you."

"Oh, I'm not afraid of that," replied Stanley. "But never fear—I'll go back from Paris."

After breakfast they engaged an open carriage, and did as much sight-seeing as Mildred could stand with safety; visiting the Palais des Arts de Long Champ, the new cathedral near the quay of the Joliette, and several other public edifices. Though

much pleased with Marseilles, Mildred declared she preferred Nice.

Sleeping accommodation being secured for Mildred and Sister Aline as well as Georgette, in the night mail to Paris, the journey contemplated by the party was accomplished very satisfactorily.

Mildred slept as well as usual while flying thus swiftly over the country, and could scarcely believe she was within a few hours of Paris when she shook off her slumbers.

Sister Aline, who could not sleep, passed the greater part of the night in prayer. Georgette never opened her eyes till she got to Fontainebleau.

Having telegraphed for rooms at the Hôtel du Louvre, they drove thither at once on their arrival at Paris.

After her long and rapid journey, Mildred found the gayest city in the world much too exciting for her.

Convinced of this by a single drive to the Bois de Boulogne and the Champs Elysées, from which she returned greatly fatigued, she resolved to remain quiet till her depar-

ture, fearing that otherwise she should not be able to accomplish the remainder of the journey.

Both Stanley and her father were of the same opinion, and counselled a couple of days' complete quietude before proceeding to London.

During a private conversation which they had together at this time, in the course of which Mildred expressed her firm conviction that she should not live long, she said to her husband, with a look he never afterwards forgot:

"When I am gone—as I soon shall be—I strongly advise you to marry Rose."

He was about to interrupt her, but she went on:

"She will make you an excellent wife. On that you may depend. Will you do as I tell you?"

"I can't promise," he replied. "Nor can I even entertain the suggestion, though I am certain you are influenced by the best and kindest feelings in making it."

"I am anxious you should not lose her—that is why I urge the matter."

"I fully recognise the kindness of your motive, and thank you," he replied. "And now no more."

Next morning, at an early hour, Mr. Warburton and those with him left Paris by an early express train.

Stanley accompanied them to the station, and there bade adieu to Mildred, almost fearing he should never behold her again.

The weather being very favourable, they had a quick passage from Calais to Dover, and proceeded immediately to London, where they put up at the squire's favourite hotel, the Grosvenor.

Having made up his mind to consult Dr. Percival, an eminent physician with whom he was acquainted, about his daughter, Mr. Warburton went in good time next morning to Hanover-square to call upon him.

Between fifty and sixty, tall, bald, with a fresh complexion, Dr. Percival had a very prepossessing expression of countenance, which was generally brightened by a smile.

"Your daughter was one of the most charming creatures I ever beheld, Mr. War-

burton," he said. "I am sorry to hear she is unwell."

"She is dangerously ill, doctor," replied the squire. And he proceeded to explain the case.

Doctor Percival listened attentively to what was told him, and the smile that had hitherto lighted up his pleasant countenance disappeared, and was succeeded by a very grave expression.

But he gave no opinion at the time, and promised to call at the Grosvenor in the course of the afternoon, in order to see the young lady, and judge for himself.

Accordingly, he came, and was taken by her father to Mildred, who was in an adjoining room with Sister Aline.

Nothing material was said while Mr. Warburton was present; but as soon as he was gone Dr. Percival drew his chair closer to the invalid, and commenced his examination.

Evidently he thought her in a most critical state, though he endeavoured not to alarm her, but there were some questions

put that showed he suspected what had been the origin of her illness.

Mildred, therefore, thought it right to tell him all, and confessed that, in a moment of despair, she had endeavoured to destroy herself by poison.

"But she has deeply, very deeply, repented of the rash act," interposed Sister Aline.

"No doubt," said Dr. Percival; "and I can quite understand how much she must have suffered ere she made the attempt. Is your father aware of this?" he added, addressing Mildred.

"He is," she replied.

"This explains much, though it does not lessen the gravity of the case," said the doctor. "You must stay with me a few days, and I shall know better how to treat you. When the prescription I am about to write is made up, it shall be sent you. To-morrow, at the same hour, I will pay you another visit. Pray, keep up your spirits; and do you, good sister, try to convince her that her case is not desperate."

"I trust I may do so conscientiously," replied Sister Aline.

"I shall hope to see you to-morrow, doctor," said Mildred.

At the same time, Sister Aline rang the bell, and the door was immediately opened by Georgette, who inquired of the doctor most anxiously, as she let him out, how he found madame.

"As well as I supposed," he rejoined.

He then went to the squire, who was in an adjoining room, and said to him at once:

"I deem it indispensable, Mr. Warburton, that your daughter should remain a few days in town."

"Well, since you say so, my dear doctor, she must," replied the squire. "But I did not calculate on the delay."

"You must give me a chance of curing her," said the doctor. "I have only just learnt what has caused this dangerous illness, and we must get rid of it."

"I hoped it was got rid of," replied the squire.

"Not entirely."

"What is your real opinion of the case, doctor? Pray, don't disguise it from me. Is there any likelihood of her recovery?"

"Don't question me," replied Dr. Percival. "Hope must be given her, or she will infallibly sink. She tells me she has no wish to live, and I entirely believe her. You must raise her spirits, if you can."

"I don't know how," replied the squire, heaving a deep sigh. "Sister Aline, whom you have seen, and who is her constant companion, does not take a very cheerful view of things."

"Apparently not," replied the doctor. "To-morrow, I will see your daughter again, and trust to find some little improvement in her."

And he took his departure.

The squire could not disobey Dr. Percival's injunctions, and since they were positive as to the necessity of remaining in town for a few days, he had no alternative but compliance.

He therefore telegraphed at once to Stanley and Lady Starkey that he was staying at the Grosvenor, where Mildred was under

the care of Dr. Percival, and would probably remain there for a few days. But he begged them not to disquiet themselves, as they should receive the earliest intelligence if any unfavourable change took place.

Immediate replies from both were sent, expressing great concern that Mildred should be detained, and Stanley declared that he held himself in readiness to start at once for London, should his presence be needed.

On her part, Lady Starkey recommended Mr. Warburton to take possession of the house in Berkeley-square. But being very well off at the Grosvenor, he did not think he should change his quarters.

XVII.

LETTERS FROM NICE.

Doctor Percival continued in daily attendance on Mildred, evidently taking the greatest interest in her, and was exceedingly disappointed that a more decided improvement was not manifest.

She certainly looked somewhat better, but the doctor could not pronounce her out of danger.

"I can't think what it is that baffles me," he said to the squire, in one of their private colloquies, "but I must and will find it out."

Telegraphic messages had been daily exchanged between the little party at the Grosvenor and the others at Nice, but, one day, a letter arrived for Mildred. It was

from Stanley, and the sight of his well-known handwriting quite cheered her.

"I am glad to find you improving, dearest Mildred," he wrote. "You are in excellent hands. If any one can cure you it is Doctor Percival. Lady Talmash has the highest opinion of him. Apropos of her ladyship, I must tell you that we have been threatened with a duel between two of her admirers—Charles Kynaston and the Comte de Clairvaux. The incident occurred on the Promenade des Anglais. I was walking in front with Rose. Behind us were the comte and her ladyship; and behind them Sir Randulph and Lady Starkey. Well, up comes Charles, looking very angry, and says to Lady Talmash, 'When you have quite done with the comte, I shall be glad if you can spare a few minutes for me.' The answer was given by De Clairvaux himself, who said, with the utmost politeness, 'I am afraid you will have to wait some time, sir. Her ladyship is engaged to me for the whole day.' 'Impossible,' cried Charles. 'No, it is true,' said Lady Talmash, 'and I intend to remain

with him.' 'Is this meant as an affront, M. le Comte?' asked Charles. 'Exactly as you like to take it, sir,' replied the comte, with provoking calmness. 'Then I shall take it as an *affront sanglant*,' replied Charles, walking away. 'There will be a duel, unless it is prevented,' observed Rose to me. 'I will try to prevent it,' I replied. Then addressing De Clairvaux, I expressed a hope that the quarrel might be arranged. 'The matter does not rest with me, but with Mr. Charles Kynaston,' he replied. 'I shall offer him no apology for what I have said, and if he challenges me I shall meet him.' 'And I will act as your *temoin*,' I said. 'I don't think a duel ought to take place,' remarked Lady Talmash. 'It is by my express desire that the comte remained with me. Charles Kynaston has broken his solemn promise not to play, and has visited the gaming tables at Monaco. Fortune, it is true, has favoured him, and he has won. But no matter, I have done with him for ever!' I had heard nothing of this, nor had any one else, not even the Comte de Clairvaux himself, who now declared

that he would not meet Mr. Kynaston, as he had not acted like a gentleman.

"The affair proceeded no further, but it is very unpleasant, and has ended in Charles Kynaston's positive dismissal by Lady Talmash."

Mildred was very much surprised, and, indeed, pained by the contents of the letter, but when she showed it to her father he shook his head, and said: "An inveterate gambler will never be cured, and Charles Kynaston *is* an inveterate gambler."

Next day brought more letters from Nice, and amongst them one from Lady Talmash herself, which Mildred immediately opened.

After expressing her great satisfaction that Mildred was under Dr. Percival's care, her ladyship entered upon her own business. "I have no doubt Stanley has told you I have dismissed Charles Kynaston, and the reason why. I believe Charles meant to keep the disgraceful affair secret, for he said nothing to me of his visit to Monaco, nor should I have heard of it had I not received a letter giving me an account of the dishonourable proceeding. I call it dis-

honourable, because he had vowed never to play again. When he next presented himself to me, I received him very coldly, and charged him with what he had done. He could not deny it, but made several idle excuses. I told him his conduct was utterly unworthy a gentleman, that our engagement was entirely at an end, and that I never would receive him again. He expressed the utmost contrition for what he had done, but would not take a dismissal. However, I put an end to the interview.

"Then followed the quarrel with the Comte de Clairvaux, of which no doubt you have heard from Stanley. What expectations the delinquent may have formed I know not, but I do not mean to forgive him. I could have no reliance upon him in future. He answers completely to Mr. Warburton's notion of a confirmed gambler. I can come to no decision respecting the Comte de Clairvaux. I am sure he likes me, and persuades himself that I would accept him. But I cannot make up my mind to do so. He has many recommendations. He belongs to an old, aristocratic

family—with a title in it—has most polished manners, as you are aware, and could introduce Madame la Comtesse to the *crème de la crème* of Parisian society, but shall I venture to whisper it?—he is *un peu trop vieux*. No! Much as I like him, I don't think I *could* marry him. This is the exact state of affairs at present. What will happen I cannot foretell."

"But I can," said Sister Aline, to whom the letter was read, and who knew the comte intimately in former days. "She *will* marry him, and she will choose well, for he is as kind-hearted as he is agreeable."

The next letter opened was from Rose, who said that "constant inquiries were made after the beautiful invalid, who was much missed by her numerous friends. Rose could not tell how long Lady Starkey meant to remain, but she had not yet fixed the date of their departure. Nice was a most charming place certainly, but she was getting rather tired of it, and should prefer being at Beaucliffe. Was Mildred aware that Marston Malpas had proposed to her? She fancied not. He was very amiable,

and sufficiently rich—but she could not make up her mind to accept him.

"Now, dearest Mildred, I wish to ask you a question, and beg you to answer me sincerely, and rest assured I will act as you wish. Circumstances have thrown me and Stanley very much together of late. Do you disapprove of this? If you do, our intimacy shall cease. But Stanley declares you like me, and won't object, and my aunt is of the same opinion. I am so glad your papa has called in that wonderful Dr. Percival. When I come back, I hope to find he has quite cured you. Lady Talmash, who has the greatest faith in the doctor, confidently predicts that such will be the case."

Mildred smiled as she laid down the letter, and said to Sister Aline, "I think they have formed a correct opinion of Dr. Percival, undoubtedly he is a very clever man."

There was one letter left. It was for the squire, and was evidently from his wife. On his return from a walk he opened it.

"Since I last wrote to you," said her

ladyship, "I have had a long talk with Lady Talmash about Dr. Percival, and she has convinced me that he is a man of remarkable ability, and I am not now without hopes of a complete cure in Mildred's case. It will certainly be a most astonishing thing if it occurs, for all here have been in despair. The match between Lady Talmash and Charles Kynaston is broken off, and I am not sorry for it, for he was not at all worthy of her in my opinion; and I think he will be succeeded by the Comte de Clairvaux, to whom I should be glad to see her united, and so, I think, would you. Sir Randal de Blundeville is still here, and the more I see of him the better I like him. He is the model of a gentleman of the old school. If you approve, I will ask him to spend a week with us at Beaucliffe on his return. Rose has decidedly refused Marston Malpas, and I am not sorry for it, as I think him a very stupid fellow.

"And now you will naturally ask how long we mean to stay here? A fortnight, I should say, but this will entirely depend on your own movements. Again I recom-

mend you to take possession of the house in Berkeley-square. Mildred and her friend, Sister Aline, would be exceedingly comfortable there. Unless you are going at once to Beaucliffe, this will be much your best plan."

"What's your opinion?" said the squire to Mildred, after reading this portion of Lady Starkey's missive to her.

"I think we may as well remain here," she replied.

"So do I," he said.

Two days afterwards the squire received another letter from Stanley, which was luckily delivered to him in his own room.

"I have a distressing story to relate to you," said Stanley. "Mention it cautiously to Mildred, as it might produce a painful effect upon her. You know that Charles Kynaston was dismissed by Lady Talmash in consequence of having broken his word in regard to play. He took the matter greatly to heart, and became very low-spirited. I called upon him, and found him very much altered. I tried to cheer

him, but when he asked whether the quarrel could be arranged, I told him frankly, I thought not. I was very sorry afterwards for what I said, since it seems to have decided him in his fatal purpose. That night the poor fellow blew out his brains. I deeply regret his fate, for though an incurable gambler, he was kind and generous, and had many good qualities."

"Poor fellow! I am very sorry for him!" exclaimed the squire, as he finished the letter.

But though Stanley wished to keep this distressing circumstance from Mildred, Lady Talmash was not so considerate. Next day brought a letter from her, in which the catrastrophe and its causes were fully detailed.

"I have been dreadfully shocked by a terrible event that has just occurred," said her ladyship. "Yesterday I tried to write to you—but could not—and to-day I am not much better. Poor Charles Kynaston has put a pistol to his head, and destroyed himself. Is it not dreadful? I shall ever reproach myself with being the cause of

his death—though it was the furthest thing from my thoughts to drive him to despair—nor did I think he would commit such a rash act. Alas! alas! I shall ever grieve for him. There is the last letter he wrote me. Keep it, or destroy it. I shall never read it—never look at it again."

Greatly touched by what she had read, Mildred took up poor Charles Kynaston's letter which had been enclosed in the other, and read as follows, with tearful eyes :

"Since I have lost your love, and forfeited your respect, life has become a burden to me, and the sooner I am rid of it the better. I loved you deeply, and notwithstanding my grave faults, I believe we might have been happy together. At all events I should have been a most devoted husband. For some time I indulged the hope that you would forgive me, and take me again into favour; but when I found you inexorable, and your love for me quite gone, life became a blank. I had nothing but despair at my heart, and my anguish was absolutely intolerable. Perhaps, when I am gone—as I soon shall be—

you will bestow a kindly thought upon my memory."

Not without deep emotion did Mildred read this letter, and her father had to brush the tears from his eyes more than once before he got through it.

"Poor Charles Kynaston!" he exclaimed. "I thought his would be a happier fate."

"I am very sorry for Lady Talmash," said Mildred. "I am afraid she will suffer severely from the shock."

Some days after this date, the squire was able to despatch a very satisfactory letter to his wife, the contents of which surprised as much as they pleased her.

"I have not written to you for the last week, because I wished to feel quite sure, before reporting it, that the wonderful cure effected by Dr. Percival would prove lasting.

"A few days since, a change for the better became apparent in Mildred, and ever since then there has been a continuous improvement. The poor invalid, who seems to have been snatched from the very jaws of death, is now getting better and stronger. Dr. Percival is quite proud of the cure he

has effected, and well he may be, for it seems almost miraculous. How much I owe him ! and what a lucky chance led me to him ! Even when I first consulted him, I was slow to recognise his extraordinary skill. But now there are no bounds to my admiration and gratitude. The poor invalid of a week ago, who could scarcely stir out of the house, is now able to drive in the Park, and even walk in Kensington Gardens. I am almost beside myself with wonder and delight. Though Dr. Percival says he considers Mildred perfectly cured, at my earnest request he still visits her daily, and his manner is so cheerful and kindly that he does us all good.

"Ere long, I believe, Mildred will have regained all her former beauty. Dr. Percival thinks she will be handsomer than ever.

"Some people at Nice admired her late delicate appearance and spiritual expression. I very much prefer her present healthy looks.

"Pray give these cheering tidings to all our friends, by whom I am sure they will

be received with the greatest satisfaction. Mildred herself will write to Stanley.

"As you will see from the address of this letter, we have followed your advice, and taken possession of the house in Berkeley-square, and are enchanted with it. Adieu!"

So astonished was Lady Starkey by this unlooked-for intelligence that she could scarcely believe what she read, but she knew the squire too well to suppose for a moment that he would exaggerate.

Stanley and Rose, together with Lady Talmash, who had not yet recovered from the dreadful shock occasioned by Charles Kynaston's death, were on the promenade at the time, but on their return she sent for them.

"I have wonderful news for you," she said; "news that will surprise and delight you."

She then read them Mr. Warburton's letter, and when she finished, exclamations of astonishment were uttered by all.

"I never heard of such a remarkable case," cried Stanley.

"Marvellous!" exclaimed Rose. "Why, she was quite given up."

"Not by me," said Lady Talmash. "I felt confident Dr. Percival would cure her."

A good deal more was said, and nothing but expressions of the greatest satisfaction were heard, but some looks were exchanged between Stanley and Rose, which did not seem to indicate that they were as highly delighted as they professed.

But there could be no question as to the sincere pleasure with which the intelligence was received by Sir Randal, the Comte de Clairvaux, and many other friends.

The question of the immediate return of the entire party was likewise raised, but nothing was decided on.

Next day, the good news was confirmed by Mildred herself, from whom Stanley received a very satisfactory letter, acquainting him with her perfect recovery.

"When I last wrote to you, dearest Stanley," she said, "hope was well-nigh extinguished in my breast, and I believed myself doomed. Since then, I have almost

miraculously recovered. The poison, lurking in my veins, that was slowly destroying me, has been expelled, and I have now quite regained my health. I did not dare write this to you before, fearing I might be too sanguine. But my recovery is real and assured, and I may congratulate myself —as I do most sincerely—on having had such a skilful physician. When you see me again, you will think I must have swallowed an elixir, so wonderfully have I improved.

"No one could be more fortunate. Had I remained at Nice for another month, I should infallibly have sunk. Had I proceeded direct to Beaucliffe, as I originally intended, without stopping in London, the like fate must have befallen me. But I was saved by the care of the best and most thoughtful of fathers. Having the greatest faith in Dr. Percival, he sought him out immediately on his arrival in town. The doctor came—saw me, and cured me.

"Now have I not reason to be grateful for my wonderful preservation? But, besides gratitude to my dear father and the

skilful physician, I owe much to one who has watched by me, and sustained me by her prayers, and now rejoices at my recovery."

Stanley had just read this letter a second time, when Rose came into the room, and he gave it to her, watching her anxiously as her eye ran over its contents.

"What think you of that?" he asked.

"I think it most extraordinary," she replied, with an expression of countenance difficult to define. "I am very glad to receive such good news, but it entirely puts an end to the hopes I had recently ventured to indulge."

Stanley made no reply, but was evidently of the same opinion.

"All is now at an end between us," she continued, sadly.

"For the present, it seems—but not, I trust, for ever," he rejoined.

"Yes, for ever," she returned. "I am afraid we must not meet again."

"Surely, we may meet as friends?"

"No, we cannot be too careful," said Rose. "I must not expose myself to cen-

sorious observation. The tidings of Mildred's wonderful recovery will soon be generally known in Nice, and will create a great sensation amongst the visitors. Thenceforward every eye will be upon us, and all sorts of conjectures will be made."

"I know it," cried Stanley. "I know how fond of scandal people here are. But I cannot give up your society."

"You must. We cannot be constantly together as we have been of late without exposing ourselves—as I have just said—to unpleasant remarks. I must consult my aunt and Lady Talmash. But I know beforehand what both will advise under these altered circumstances. They will tell me we have no alternative but to part for ever."

"That would be hard indeed," cried Stanley. "You will drive me to despair."

"It is very painful to me, even to make the suggestion," she said, "but I cannot act otherwise, and on calm reflection you will feel I am right."

"But this must not be our last interview," he cried.

"I intended it should be. But if my aunt deems it proper I will meet you once more."

And she quitted the room, leaving him well-nigh heart-broken.

XVIII.

STANLEY RETURNS FROM NICE.

In the boudoir at Lady Starkey's charming house in Berkeley-square, and seated on a fauteuil, we shall find Mildred, looking very different from that young lady when prostrated by illness.

With renovated health all her beauty has returned, and though the bloom on her fair cheek may be somewhat more delicate than formerly, it could scarcely be improved. Indeed, it may be doubted whether she ever looked lovelier than now. Her worthy father thought not.

A gentle expression, not entirely free from sadness, pervaded her countenance, and imparted a singular sweetness to her smile.

The coquetry that at one time characterised her, and seemed part of herself, had

entirely vanished, and was succeeded by a very quiet, pleasing manner.

On the present occasion, her charms were enhanced, if possible, by a very becoming, though simple morning toilette, arranged by Georgette, who was still in the room, gazing with admiration at her lovely mistress.

On the opposite side of a little table, placed between them, sat Sister Aline.

For some minutes the latter had been contemplating her friend with mute satisfaction, and now said, "I am sure you are quite well enough to do without me, and I can therefore return to the Retreat."

"Oh! no, no. I cannot part with you yet," replied Mildred. "You must stay with me a little longer—you must accompany me to Beaucliffe."

"Oh! pray don't leave us!" implored Georgette.

"I dare not give a positive promise to stay," said Sister Aline, touched by their entreaties. "I may be recalled, and in that case, I must obey the mandate of the Lady Superior."

"I would not have you disobey it, dearest sister," rejoined Mildred. "But I have a special reason for begging you to accompany me to Beaucliffe. When the party return from Nice, as they will very shortly, we shall all meet there, and I shall want your counsel. Till lately, I thought my life was ended, and spoke and acted—so far as I acted at all—under that impression. Having recovered, I take a somewhat different view of things. Under these circumstances, no one, except my dear and excellent father, can give me such good advice as you."

"I will give you the best advice I can, depend upon it," replied Sister Aline. "I quite understand your position, and can judge what ought to be done. Unlooked-for difficulties may possibly arise, which I may help you to overcome. I will, therefore, accompany you to Beaucliffe—unless prevented."

At this juncture, Georgette, hearing well-known voices, flew to the door and opened it, admitting Mr. Warburton and Doctor Percival, the latter of whom immediately

stepped forward, and shook hands with his patient, while the squire addressed himself to Sister Aline.

"Still, the same good signs!" cried the doctor, holding Mildred's hand in his own, and triumphantly regarding her. "You are now on firm ground, and can stand alone."

"I believe so, doctor," she replied. "But you mustn't desert me."

"I don't mean to desert you," he replied. "But I must surrender you to your husband, who, I suppose, will soon come from Nice to claim you. Well, I shall have the proud satisfaction of delivering you to him perfectly cured."

"He will feel that he owes you a large debt of gratitude, doctor, as I do," said Mr. Warburton.

"You overrate my services, my good sir," replied the doctor, evidently much pleased. "But I own I have been remarkably fortunate. I wonder Mr. Brereton has not come back before this. With such a wife I don't think I should have been so long on the road."

"But you forget, doctor," said Mr. Warburton, "that she didn't look as well as she does now when he saw her last."

"True," replied Dr. Percival. "Still I can't understand the delay."

"Here he is!" exclaimed Georgette. "That's his voice, I'm certain."

Again she threw open the door. In another moment Stanley rushed in, and instantly perceiving his wife, who had risen on his appearance, clasped her to his breast.

"A perfectly miraculous cure has, indeed, been wrought in you," he exclaimed, regarding her with astonishment.

"It has been wrought by the skilful physician, Dr. Percival, who now stands beside you," remarked Mr. Warburton.

"Yes, Mr. Brereton, and I assure you I am proud of my work," said Dr. Percival. "I never performed a cure with more satisfaction to myself."

Stanley took the hand offered him by the doctor, and shook it most heartily.

"I cannot thank you sufficiently, sir," he said. "Nor can I find adequate terms

to express my satisfaction at your most successful achievement."

Then, turning to his wife, he said: "Why, you look better and younger than you did before you became mine."

"I am glad you think so, dearest Stanley," she replied, tenderly.

"There cannot be a doubt about it," he rejoined. "Your father must entertain the same opinion."

"He does!" exclaimed Mr. Warburton. "And he is rejoiced to find you think so."

"Well, I have all along thought this the most satisfactory cure I ever performed," said the doctor. "Now, I have no doubt about it. I wish you all good morning."

And he quitted the room rather hastily.

"I am sorry he's gone," said Stanley. "I have something rather particular to say to him on the part of Lady Talmash."

"Oh! he would have liked to hear it, I'm sure," said the squire, "for I know he has a great regard for her. But follow him down stairs quickly, and you'll catch him."

Acting on the suggestion, Stanley hurried out of the room, and caught Dr. Percival before he left the house.

The doctor appeared much interested by the message from Lady Talmash, though it was merely to tell him she was unwell, and meant to consult him on her return.

"Nothing serious, I hope, is the matter with her?" he inquired. "I may not be always as fortunate as I have been with your wife."

"Did you hear of the suicide of poor Charles Kynaston, to whom her ladyship was engaged?" asked Stanley. "He was an irreclaimable gambler, and her reproaches unquestionably drove him to the rash act. She takes the matter very much to heart, and her regrets have no doubt materially affected her health. This is the case."

"It appears more mental than bodily," said the doctor. "Well, I'll do my best. She is a charming creature, and I have a great regard for her. But I don't profess to cure a broken heart. The surest remedy would be another suitor."

"She is already provided with one—but

he is rather elderly—the Comte de Clairvaux."

"De Clairvaux! I know him—a most agreeable, most accomplished gentleman. Oh! she'll get better speedily in his hands. He's a much better doctor than I am, and if he comes with her, she won't want me."

"She thinks otherwise," said Stanley.

"I suppose they will all shortly return from Nice?" remarked the doctor.

"They must have started by this time, on the homeward journey, I should think," replied Stanley. "But the Comte de Clairvaux may induce them to make a short halt at Paris. And now, let me thank you again, my dear doctor, for the great service you have rendered me."

"I really do deserve your thanks," replied the other. "Had you lost your wife, you would have lost a treasure."

"I am quite of that opinion," replied Stanley.

A slight smile played upon the doctor's good-humoured countenance.

Stanley did not notice it, but said, while

taking leave of him at the door, "We shall see you here to-morrow."

"There is no reason why you should," replied the doctor; "but your wife won't dismiss me, so I suppose I *must* make my appearance."

"Certainly, your dismissal must come from her, not from me," replied Stanley, smiling.

"By-the-by, hasn't Lady Starkey a very pretty niece?" inquired the doctor.

"Rose Hylton is generally considered pretty," replied Stanley, with affected indifference.

"Is she going to be married?" inquired the doctor. "I heard so."

"Not yet, at any rate," replied Stanley.

And Dr. Percival went his way.

Stanley then returned to the boudoir, where he found Mildred alone, all the others having left the room. So he took the seat recently occupied by Sister Aline.

For a few minutes, he gazed at his lovely wife in silence, and she smiled at him sweetly the while.

"I didn't think it possible you could

have regained your good looks in this marvellous manner," he said. "There must be sorcery in it."

"No, I have simply recovered my health," she replied.

"You have recovered more than your health," he said. "You have added to your charms. You seem to have bathed in the Bath of Beauty."

"Don't flatter me, I beg of you," she rejoined, with a very slight manifestation of displeasure. "I have quite lost my taste for that sort of thing."

"Nay, my admiration is genuine, and really irrepressible," said Stanley. "Surely I may say what I think of you?"

"Of course, but I am quite unaccustomed to such fine speeches, and really don't care for them. Let us turn to some one else who is pretty. How is Rose looking?"

"Just as well as when you saw her last," he replied. "But pray, don't let a thought concerning her trouble you. Now that she has heard of your surprising recovery, she indulges in no idle dreams."

"Are you quite sure of that, Stanley? I begin to feel I might be jealous. It is a very unworthy feeling, and I will subdue it if I can."

"You will have no cause for jealousy, of that I am certain, dearest Mildred," he said, earnestly. "And I hope you won't destroy your own happiness by any unjust suspicions."

Seeing he looked a little annoyed, she thought it necessary to explain her meaning.

"If it were the case, dear Stanley," she said, "I couldn't blame either you or Rose. When I thought myself on the point of death I strongly urged you to choose her as a wife, because I thought she would exactly suit you, and if you have entered into any engagement with her, I cannot blame either you or her."

"Whatever may have passed between us, all is now completely at an end," replied Stanley. "Clearly understand that Rose, herself, on hearing of your wondrous cure, positively declared it must be so. You may

place implicit confidence in her. She is truth itself."

"I know it," replied Mildred. "I shall, therefore, dismiss all uneasiness, and welcome her as a sister."

"I am truly glad to hear it," replied Stanley.

XIX.

DOCTOR PERCIVAL'S ADVICE TO LADY TALMASH.

A FEW days afterwards, Lady Starkey and Rose arrived, accompanied by Lady Talmash, and came at once to Berkeley-square.

A telegram from Paris, announcing their return, had been received by Mr. Warburton, on the previous day, so that all preparations were made for them.

They were quite amazed by the improvement in Mildred's appearance, and declared she looked handsomer than she had ever done before — thus confirming Stanley's opinion.

Their exclamations of astonishment and delight had scarcely ceased, when Dr. Percival himself came in with Stanley, and

received a very warm welcome from all—especially from Lady Talmash.

"I don't know what we can do to manifest our gratitude to Dr. Percival, and our high opinion of his skill," said the squire.

"Your son-in-law and yourself have already done too much," said the doctor. "And such praises as I have just received from the ladies, are worth more to me than the richest gifts. But I am sorry to observe that Nice doesn't seem to have agreed with you all. Lady Starkey is the only one who appears to have profited by the visit."

"They have suffered from the mistral, I suppose," replied her ladyship. "But you must kindly take them in hand, doctor."

"Oh, they don't want medical aid," he said.

"Indeed, we do," they both rejoined.

"Have you left the Comte de Clairvaux and Sir Randal de Blundeville in Paris?" asked the squire.

"No, they came with us to London," replied Lady Starkey. "They are gone to the Grosvenor to secure rooms, and will be here presently."

"Both are old friends of mine," remarked the doctor, "and I shall be rejoiced to meet them again."

This meeting took place in the drawing-room, and Dr. Percival therefore easily found an opportunity of taking Lady Talmash aside, and said to her:

"I hope your ladyship is better?"

"Not much," she replied. "Come and see me to-morrow morning, and I will explain all."

"Without waiting till to-morrow, I can tell you what is the matter with you. You reproach yourself with being the cause of Charles Kynaston's death."

"You have guessed the truth, dear doctor," she replied. "That dreadful occurrence weighs upon my spirits, and I fear will kill me. Since his death I have discovered how much I loved him. I cannot replace him, and would now give all I possess to bring him to life again."

"Had you married him, you would not have been happy," said the doctor. "Console yourself with that reflection."

"I might not have been perfectly happy, but I should not be wretched, as I now am."

"I am told the Comte de Clairvaux is devoted to you. Is it so?"

"He has already offered me his hand."

"Then accept him. You may not love him as you did Charles Kynaston, but he will cause you no uneasiness. Were Kynaston still living I should recommend this course. Think the matter over and let me know your decision to-morrow."

"Were I to accept the comte, I feel as if I should do an injustice to Charles's memory."

"In what way? Having broken his word, Charles Kynaston had forfeited all right to your hand. The Comte de Clairvaux, I am convinced, is vastly his superior in every respect."

"No, there you are mistaken, doctor. Charles Kynaston was young, and very handsome."

"But he had a serious fault, which would have militated against your chance of happiness with him. It seems a harsh thing

to say, but I really believe you are well rid of him."

"Oh, doctor, how cruel you are!" she exclaimed.

"Upon my word I don't think so," he rejoined. "Indeed, I am convinced he would have made you very unhappy had you married him."

Their discourse was here interrupted by the entrance of the comte and Sir Randal.

"Why there he is!" exclaimed the doctor. "There is the comte. Always the same air *de bon ton* about him! always the same distinguished manner! Charles Kynaston can never have been anything like that," he muttered.

Welcomed by the squire and Stanley, the new-comers were conducted by them to Mildred, who occupied a sofa with Rose at the further end of the room, and like everybody else they were enraptured by the improvement in her appearance.

"*C'est merveilleux!*" exclaimed the comte, in astonishment. "I could not have believed in the change, unless I had seen it."

"Nor I," added Sir Randal.

The former invalid, who had risen at their approach, repaid their praises with the sweetest smile imaginable.

"I am entirely indebted to Dr. Percival for my wondrous restoration to health," she said.

"Ah! I always had a high opinion of him," said Sir Randal. "But I did not imagine he could work miracles."

"*C'est incroyable!*" exclaimed the comte.

At this moment Stanley came up with the doctor, and presented him to the two gentlemen, by whom he was received with enthusiasm.

"I don't deserve half your commendations, gentlemen," he said. "But I own they are very gratifying to me."

"If you can perform such cures as this, doctor, you ought to have a European reputation," said Sir Randal.

"To restore health is one thing, to restore beauty is another," said the comte. "You have achieved both. *Prenez mon conseil*," he added in a mysterious whisper, "*Il faut*

venir à Paris, et soigner toutes nos plus belles malades."

"A good idea," replied the doctor, laughing. "Perhaps I may act upon it."

Just then luncheon was announced, and the squire, after begging Sir Randal to take charge of his wife, went in search of Lady Talmash. The Comte de Clairvaux offered his arm to Mildred, but she declined, and so did Rose. Presently all the party, except the two occupants of the sofa, had left the room.

"Now I can say a word to you," cried Rose.

"I shall be glad to hear anything you have to tell me," replied Mildred, regarding her very affectionately.

"First of all, I wish you to understand that I am most sincerely rejoiced at your wonderful recovery. I must ever feel deeply grateful for the interest you have taken in me, but I entreat you to believe that I have completely banished all thoughts from my mind, which you once encouraged me to indulge. Had I not done so, you would not see me here."

"I have the most perfect reliance in you, dearest Rose," replied Mildred, taking her hand; "and I still think you would have suited Stanley far better than myself. I therefore desired to make him and you amends for separating you, and wished you to understand that I was favourable to your union. But since my health has been most unexpectedly restored, and I may count on a new lease of life, my feelings are naturally changed. I must retain Stanley."

"Of course," cried Rose. "I would not deprive you of him for the world. Nor should I have listened to him for a moment, had I not understood that it was your wish. But even then, I felt there was great impropriety in acting as I did, and I have blamed myself most severely for doing so. You may perfectly trust me, but if you will feel easier without me, I will go."

"No, I do not wish it, dearest Rose," rejoined Mildred. "I am quite sure you would not wrong me, either in word or deed. I believe your disposition to be perfectly truthful."

"I would rather die than injure you,

dearest Mildred, and I am quite certain that equal dependence can be placed on Stanley."

"No doubt," replied Mildred. "Considering my shameful conduct towards him, he has behaved most admirably, and I owe him a debt of gratitude I can never repay. To prove it fully, I ought really to have died, but this was more than I could do."

"When you quitted Nice, I know you entertained but slight hopes of recovery."

"I entertained none. But as you see, Dr. Percival has cured me. Believing, as I do, that Heaven has spared me for some good purpose, I must not thwart it. When the opportunity occurs I may be useful to Stanley, and in that belief I shall act. If at any time I should exhibit a feeling of jealousy, heed it not! It will pass instantly."

"I will do as you bid me," replied Rose, earnestly.

"After this explanation I shall feel quite easy," replied Mildred; "and will do all I can to contribute to your happiness. You must go with us to Beaucliffe."

"Now I have learnt your wishes, I can accept my aunt's invitation. But I assure you I would not have done so, unless I had felt quite sure my presence would not annoy you."

"Have no fear," replied Mildred. "I am sure we shall now get on very well together."

XX.

FESTIVITIES AT BEAUCLIFFE.

Dr. Percival proved as successful in his treatment of Lady Talmash as he had done with Mildred, but he had fewer difficulties to contend with.

He very soon convinced her ladyship that she would be happier with the Comte de Clairvaux than with her former ill-fated suitor. Her spirits, therefore, quickly revived, and she regained her good looks.

He did not choose to question Rose, nor to dissuade her from going to Beaucliffe, as he had a very high opinion of her prudence and thought there would be no risk. Moreover, he was quite aware of the very good understanding that now subsisted between Rose and Mildred, and feared to disturb it.

After a week in town, which was spent very pleasantly but very quietly, the whole party set off to Beaucliffe and Brereton, and were distributed between the two houses, Lady Talmash and Rose being received by Mrs. Brereton, who was delighted to have them with her, and all the others—including Sister Aline—moving on to the larger mansion.

The weather was exceedingly pleasant, and the country most attractive. The squire and Lady Starkey exercised unbounded hospitality towards their guests, and did all they could to contribute to their amusement. The mornings were spent in the gardens and grounds, and the ladies came over from Brereton to play lawn tennis, or otherwise amuse themselves.

Every day there was a large party at luncheon, and excursions took place afterwards, either on horseback or *en voiture*, for there was plenty to see in the neighbourhood.

Every day there was a large dinner at half-past seven, with such cookery and such capital wine as could only be got at Beaucliffe, cards, music, and dancing to follow.

The Comte de Clairvaux and Sir Randal, in whose honour all this festivity took place, were naturally highly gratified, but at the end of a week they began to think they were running the squire rather too hard, and ought to take their departure.

Accordingly they made a suggestion to that effect, but worthy Mr. Warburton would not listen to them.

"I fully calculated on your spending a month with me," he said, "and shall be greatly disappointed if you don't. I shall fancy you are tired of the place."

"Tired of the place! Impossible!" said De Clairvaux. "I never stayed at a château so agreeable, so hospitable—never—*Foi de gentilhomme!*"

"I can only echo what the comte has just said," added Sir Randal. "Never have I experienced such perfect hospitality."

"You do me too much honour, gentlemen," said Mr. Warburton. "But I am glad you have seen Beaucliffe to advantage, and not as it has been of late."

"We have seen a most delightful place," said the comte, with enthusiasm; "and if

you keep us here much longer, we shall never be able to tear ourselves away."

"The ladies have just arrived from Brereton," said the squire, looking forth into the garden. "Will you join them?"

"With the greatest pleasure," they replied, his friends following him through the open *porte-croisée* to the lawn, where they found Lady Talmash and Rose, who had just walked over from Brereton, escorted by Stanley.

Both looked very well, and were charmingly dressed. From the manner in which the comte was received by her ladyship, it would almost seem he was accepted. But he paid her as much homage as before, while on her part she seemed rather vain of his devoted attention.

Stanley went into the house, but presently returned with Lady Starkey and Mildred.

Never in her brightest days had the latter looked so lovely as now. On her appearance she completely threw the others into the shade—but she did not seem even conscious of her superior beauty.

Sir Randal looked at her with astonishment, and said in a low voice to Stanley:

"I never saw anything like it. I declare your wife grows more lovely every day."

Stanley seemed gratified, but made no reply.

Most of the other persons present were of Sir Randal's opinion, and the general impression was that Mildred was far handsomer than she used to be.

Beaucliffe had once more become the rendezvous of all the fashionable folks in the neighbourhood, and this morning it fully maintained its character. A great number of persons called, almost all of whom found their way to the garden, where lawn tennis was now going on.

All the old gaiety of the place seemed suddenly revived, to the squire's great delight. Mildred took no part in the amusements, but looked on and encouraged them, and the lawn soon presented a very lively scene.

Both Stanley and Rose played lawn tennis so well as to excite general admira-

tion, and Mildred complimented the latter on her skill.

"I wish you would take my place," said Rose. "Everybody would be delighted."

"I have forgotten all about it."

"You used to play much better than I do."

But Mildred shook her head.

"I must resist temptation," she said. "I have promised never to play again, and I won't break my word."

"Nonsense!" cried Stanley, who heard what passed. There is no harm whatever in lawn tennis."

"I don't disapprove of it," she replied. "But I won't play."

After several exciting contests, in which Rose especially distinguished herself, a large party assembled at luncheon, when there was plenty of iced champagne; but Mildred did not quit the bench on which she had taken a seat.

Here she was joined by Sister Aline, who had been walking in a different part of the garden, and when the company came forth again they had both disappeared.

XXI.

MILDRED VISITS THE STABLES.

Not for a long, long time, had Mildred visited the stables—formerly so attractive to her—but one day she went with Rose to look at them. Mildred was accompanied by Stanley and her father, both of whom watched her with great interest.

Arrived at the entrance to the stables, her courage seemed to desert her and she was about to turn back, but at length she yielded to her husband's persuasions and went in.

"You see what my good resolutions are worth," she said, as she entered. "I had resolved never again to put myself in the way of temptation, and here I am."

"But what harm can these horses do you?" asked her father.

"A great deal," she replied. "They may lead me into mischief."

"I don't see how," he said.

"All my former errors originated in my fondness for horses," she said; "and I had resolved never to ride again, and here I am exposing myself to temptation. I cannot look at them without longing for a ride."

"Well, pray gratify your wish," said Stanley. "You will be none the worse for a good gallop, but a great deal better."

"Stanley is quite right," said the squire. "I long to see you on horseback again, and so do a good many others."

"You tempt me very much," she cried, going up to a magnificent hunter and patting his glossy side; "but I must not yield."

"If I could ride like you I shouldn't hesitate," said Rose. "Besides, I can see no harm in it. I should like immensely to have a gallop on this horse, and should feel that the exercise would do me a vast deal of good."

"So it would," replied Mildred. "I don't doubt it for a moment."

"Why should a gallop be beneficial in one case and not in another?" said Rose.

"I'll explain," replied Mildred, gravely. "I once was passionately fond of hunting, and thought myself a first-rate horsewoman."

"So you are," said Stanley. "I'll answer for that."

"That notion made me vain—excessively vain," replied Mildred. "I was told there was no one like me in the hunting field, and I believed it. Now that I see my danger I have resolved not to expose myself again to a like temptation. Never more will I be seen on horseback—never more indulge in a gallop!"

"A very foolish resolution," said Stanley. "And I hope you won't keep it. Here is a stable full of horses, from which you may choose."

"Your own famous hunter is among them," remarked the squire.

"I know it," she replied. "But I should hesitate even to take him. I am persuaded if I begin to ride again some ill will befall me."

"Banish these feelings," said her father; "they are unworthy of you. I am surprised to find you so superstitious!"

"I cannot help it," she replied. "If I once begin I shall go on, and then there is no telling where I shall stop."

"Well—well! do as you please," said the squire.

"For my part I have no misgivings," remarked Rose, "and should very much enjoy a ride one of these days."

"Any time you like," said the squire; "and Stanley I'm sure will take charge of you."

"That he will with pleasure," he replied. "Make your own choice. The horses all want exercise."

"Take my favourite hunter, if you will," said Mildred.

"No, no," rejoined the squire. "In spite of all your boasted resolutions, I hope to see you mount him again one of these days—so I shall keep him exclusively for you."

"You are always kind," observed Mildred to her father. "Well, I must confess I am

highly pleased with my visit to the stables, and shall probably come here again before long."

A couple of grooms, who had been employed in the stalls, now came forth, and one of them expressed a hope that he should soon see his young mistress again.

"Very likely you will, Tom," she replied, smiling at him as she went out. "But I can't make any positive promise."

"I hope she means to begin again," said Tom to his fellows. "We've had no ladies worth lookin' at in the field since she left off huntin'."

XXII.

A THUNDERSTORM IN DELAMERE FOREST.

NEXT day, a small party, hastily arranged by Stanley, and provided with horses from the squire's well-stocked stables, set out, at a tolerably early hour, on a ride to Delamere Forest.

Besides Stanley himself, who acted as leader of the expedition, the party comprised Lady Talmash and Rose, with the Comte de Clairvaux and Sir Randal de Blundeville, and was attended by the two grooms we found in the stables on the previous day.

The ladies did not start from Beaucliffe, but from Brereton, where they were staying, and where their steeds were brought by the grooms, and both looked remarkably well in the riding-habits lent them by Mildred.

Mildred, we may mention, had been

asked by her husband to accompany them, but declined, as he expected she would.

As the weather was very propitious and promised to continue fine, a delightful day was anticipated; but Mrs. Brereton, who witnessed the departure, looked grave and predicted thunder. Nobody, however, heeded her warning at the time, and the party set off in excellent spirits resolved to enjoy themselves.

Their road led them past several old halls, the owners of which were intimate friends both of Stanley and Sir Randal, but they made no calls. Many timber and plaster farmhouses—some of the larger of which had formerly been mansions and were still moated—attracted their notice. Almost all these picturesque habitations had large farmyards attached to them, with cow-houses, great barns, and orchards filled with grey, old damson trees—the fruit of which, Sir Randal said, made the most delicious puddings. Adjacent to these comfortable dwellings were rich pastures filled with cattle, promising a good supply of the cheeses for which Cheshire is famous.

As the country was rather flat and the hedges high, the views were not very extensive, but whenever a little eminence was gained, commanding the distant Mersey, near Warrington, or some sheet of water close at hand, the prospect was beautiful.

Now-a-days very little is left of the real Delamere Forest, almost all the oldest trees being cleared off, and the tract cultivated. The famous chase is robbed of the red and fallow deer, which used to draw the huntsmen of former days to it in crowds, and is little better than a waste, covered with heath and abounding with rabbits. Such a scene as this did not look very inviting, and neither of the ladies could praise it.

But the point to which Stanley wished to conduct them was Eddisbury Hill, whence a magnificent view can be obtained, comprehending the wide vale of Chester, Chester itself, the Mersey, and the whole of the site of old Delamere Forest.

On the summit of this commanding height an old fortress once stood, and the remains of an ancient camp are still visible.

As the party mounted the eminence, Rose noticed that the sky had darkened, and expressed her uneasiness to Stanley, who endeavoured to reassure her.

"I don't think there is any cause for apprehension," he said. "The storm will pass off."

But instead of passing off it became worse, and Mrs. Brereton's warning was fulfilled.

Just as the summit of Eddisbury Hill was gained and they were admiring the wonderful prospect, a loud crack of thunder was heard, and a flash of lightning struck the ground a little in advance of the troop.

Rose, who was riding in front with Stanley, was much frightened and exclaimed, "Do let us go down and take shelter somewhere. A dreadful thunderstorm is coming on and we shall be exposed to its full violence here."

"Yes, this has quite taken me by surprise," he replied. "I didn't believe either in my mother's warning, or the threatening sky. But there is no mistake about it now. We must turn back," he called to the others.

"But where shall we find shelter?" asked Sir Randal.

"Where we can, I suppose," replied Stanley, as another clap of thunder was heard, rather louder than the first.

"I shall never be able to keep my seat if this goes on," said Rose, whose terror seemed to increase.

Lady Talmash seemed equally frightened, and turning her horse's head dashed down the hill. She was instantly followed by the comte and Sir Randal, but neither of them could overtake her or render any assistance, and both expected she would have a dangerous fall.

Fearing Rose would start in the same headlong style, and possibly come to grief, Stanley seized her bridle and restrained the steed.

Meanwhile there was no cessation in the storm; and equally alarmed with the rest, the grooms rode down the hill.

"We must find shelter somewhere," cried Rose. "There is a large tree yonder; let us get to it."

"Better no shelter at all than such as

that tree will afford," said Stanley. "You see all the others have avoided it."

"I know that a tree is considered very dangerous in a thunderstorm," she replied. "But since nothing else offers I'll run the risk of being struck by lightning. Pray let go my bridle!"

Seeing she was becoming terribly alarmed, Stanley complied.

Thus released she instantly dashed down the hill in the direction of the tree, and he followed.

As they came down, Sir Randal, who was the only person visible, shouted to them, and Stanley pointed to the tree. The baronet made a gesture of warning, but they paid no heed to it, and went on.

Scarcely had they reached the old oak that offered them the cover of its branches, when Stanley was obliged to help Rose to dismount, or she would have fallen. With the greatest difficulty could he sustain her in her present half-fainting state, and at the same time prevent their steeds, which were now well-nigh unmanageable, from breaking away.

But he was quickly relieved from the latter embarrassment by the arrival of the grooms, who had been sent to him by Sir Randal.

"Must we stop here, sir?" asked Tom, looking much frightened.

"No," replied Stanley. "Take away the horses; but bring them back as soon as the storm is over."

"Be sure we will, sir," said Tom. "You shan't have to wait."

And as he walked off with his fellow-servant, he remarked, "I shouldn't mind a little danger if I had such a pretty girl as that with me."

Rose, we may mention, in her fright, had flung her arms over Stanley's shoulder, while he was necessarily obliged to support her.

But the danger apprehended by all actually did occur. The storm seemed to draw nearer till it finally settled overhead. A louder clap of thunder than had yet been heard, was followed by an explosion like that of a bomb, and it became instantly apparent that the tree was struck; a large

portion of the bark being torn from the trunk.

For a few moments Stanley fancied that both he and Rose were injured, but he soon found, to his great relief, that such was not the case.

Rose screamed and became insensible, and had not quite recovered when the grooms returned. At that time she was clasping Stanley round the neck, and he could not disengage himself.

"Look there!" whispered Tom, winking at his companion.

But their attention was instantly diverted by the damage done to the tree, and they both congratulated themselves on their escape.

"I told you how it would be," said Tom, pointing to the scathed oak. "Take warnin' by this, and keep away from trees in a thunderstorm."

But the storm was now quite over, and the sky began rapidly to clear. Tom deemed it right to prepare his master for the approach of the others, and before they came up both Stanley and Rose were again on horseback

—though the latter still looked exceedingly pale.

Ever since the last tremendous crash, the new-comers felt sure that the tree had been struck, and were not surprised therefore to find that such was the fact.

"What an escape we have had to be sure!" cried Lady Talmash. "I wouldn't have been here when that mischief occurred."

"You would have heard such a crash as you never heard before," said Stanley. "I thought it would have deafened me. Now, what shall we do? There is a nice little inn on the way to Vale Royal. Shall we go and lunch there?"

"No—no——" replied Lady Talmash. "Let us get back as fast as we can. I am drenched through."

So they rode off, and made no stoppage till they got to Beaucliffe, where they were anxiously expected. One of the grooms was despatched to Brereton with tidings of their safe return.

XXIII.

GEORGETTE UNINTENTIONALLY MAKES MISCHIEF.

THAT evening Sister Aline was sitting with Mildred in her dressing-room, when Georgette, without being summoned, came in. As she looked as if she had something to tell, her mistress inquired what it was.

"I have just heard a comical little story relating to the storm of this morning from Tom, the groom," replied Georgette. "But I am not sure that madame may care to hear it."

"Oh, yes I should, very much," replied Mildred.

"Madame has heard, I suppose, that an old tree under which two persons took shelter during the storm, was struck by lightning?"

"Yes, but there is nothing comical in that, rather the reverse, I think," replied her mistress.

"Tom thought the lady had fainted when he took away the horses," said Georgette; "but when he brought them back, she had recovered, and was tenderly embracing the gentleman."

"Embracing him!" exclaimed Mildred, surprised.

"Yes, she had got her arms round his neck, and he was clasping her to his breast."

"Are you certain of what you tell us?" observed Sister Aline.

"I only repeat what was told me, and cannot vouch for its truth," replied Georgette. "But I myself believe the story."

"Do you know who the pair were?" asked Mildred.

"I fancy they must have been Lady Talmash and the Comte de Clairvaux," said Georgette.

Mildred exchanged glances with Sister Aline.

"You don't think one of them was Miss Rose Hylton?" asked Sister Aline.

"Oh, no! I'm certain not," replied Georgette, perceiving the mistake she had made. "I'm quite sure Tom told me it was Lady Talmash."

Mildred did not seem half reassured.

"Are the two ladies gone back to Brereton to-night?" asked Sister Aline.

Mildred replied in the affirmative.

"Don't trouble your head about the matter," remarked Sister Aline. "It's a ridiculous invention of the groom."

"No, I believe it to be true," said Mildred. "I thought something unpleasant would come of this expedition. They both seemed so anxious about it."

"Why didn't you go with them?" asked Sister Aline.

"I should only have been in the way," replied Mildred. "Besides, I have resolved never to ride out again."

"There you are wrong," said Sister Aline. "This could not have happened if you had made one of the party."

"I'm not sure of that," replied the other.

"They don't mind me. No doubt the explanation of this incident will be that Rose was so dreadfully frightened by the thunder, that she didn't know what she was about, but I don't believe it."

"Pray pardon me, madame, for the *bêtise* I have committed," implored Georgette. "I blame myself exceedingly for mentioning the circumstance to you. But I still believe the two persons were Lady Talmash and the comte.

"Make no more excuses. Where is your master? In the drawing-room?"

"No, madame," replied Georgette, looking rather embarrassed. "Monsieur and the comte have gone with the ladies in the open carriage to Brereton Hall."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mildred.

"Perhaps they may have come back by this time, madame, shall I see?"

"No, no," cried her mistress. "But you needn't stay here."

As soon as Georgette had withdrawn, Sister Aline took her friend's hand, and said to her in an affectionate tone, "Pray don't view this silly matter in a serious

light. Rose must have been dreadfully frightened by the storm, and Tom, no doubt, grossly exaggerated what he beheld. As to the two gentlemen driving out with the ladies to Brereton Hall, that means nothing. But if you desire to be happy, you must really dismiss all feelings of jealousy, for which there is no cause. Rose regards you as a sister, and would never deceive you; but little circumstances will occur — as they have occurred to-day—that may throw an air of suspicion on the most blameless conduct. For my own part I don't believe half that was told by the groom to Georgette, but I quite acquit him of any desire to make mischief."

"Yes, I am sure he didn't intend that," said Mildred; "neither did Georgette—she spoke without consideration, and only meant to amuse us. I will do my best to cure myself of this causeless jealousy. It certainly does interfere with my happiness. Apart from any such feelings, I am very much attached to Rose, and regard her as a sister."

"I know it," replied Sister Aline. "Now pray attend to what I am about to say, and act upon it. You have taken a resolution not to ride on horseback again. There you are wrong. By adhering to it, you will lose a great deal of your husband's society, and voluntarily surrender your proper place by his side to others. Besides, I shall not flatter you when I say that no one here rides so well as you do. Your worthy father is of the same opinion, and constantly regrets your disappearance. By resuming equestrian exercise in moderation—mind, I say, in moderation—you will please both him and your husband."

"I will consider your counsel, dear sister," said Mildred. "But I am really afraid that the resumption of horse exercise will bring me ill luck. I know you will deem me weak and superstitious to indulge such a notion, but I cannot help it."

"What kind of ill luck do you apprehend?" asked Sister Aline.

"I know not," replied Mildred. "But if I should become as vain and foolish as I was formerly, I would not answer for my-

self, and I therefore think I ought to avoid temptation."

"Undoubtedly, unless you feel strong enough to resist it. But in my opinion you have obtained perfect control over yourself, and have nothing to fear."

"You really think so?"

"I do."

At this moment the door opened, and Stanley came in. His wife seemed pleased to see him.

"Georgette tells me you have been inquiring about me," he said. "I have just been to Brereton with Lady Talmash and Rose. They seemed to have quite recovered their spirits. I have promised to take them out again some early day, provided you will go with us—but not otherwise."

"I will think the matter over, and let you know my decision to-morrow."

"I've just been urging her to ride out with you," remarked Sister Aline.

"I'm very glad to hear it," replied Stanley. "Use your influence, and the difficulties will vanish. But I'm glad she did

not go with us to-day, for all pleasure was spoiled by the storm."

"Was it a very bad storm?" asked Sister Aline.

"Very bad," he replied; "I never beheld a worse. Rose and myself had really a most miraculous escape from destruction, but she was well-nigh frightened to death. I shall avoid trees in future. So you may safely promise to accompany us on our next excursion."

"Will you let me ride by your side, and not leave me to the care of other persons?" asked Mildred.

"I will," he replied.

"That is a great inducement," she said. "But I can't promise now."

Stanley looked puzzled, but turning to Sister Aline, said, "I calculate on your aid."

He then quitted the room.

XXIV.

MILDRED AGREES TO RIDE OUT WITH STANLEY ALONE.

No one could have suited Mr. Warburton better than Lady Starkey. She quite understood his tastes and habits, and laid herself out to please him. With all the visitors she was extremely popular, being very affable and obliging, and the whole household was devoted to her. Perhaps the only person she did not really like was Sister Aline, but she always behaved to her with the greatest possible kindness and consideration, and they had never had the slightest misunderstanding. Sister Aline, indeed, had a very great respect for her.

Hitherto, Lady Starkey had maintained her good looks, and she always dressed re-

markably well. Nothing had surprised her more than Mildred's remarkable recovery, and whether she was altogether pleased by it may be doubted; but at any rate she behaved very well, and allowed no sign of annoyance to appear.

For Rose her affection was quite maternal. Having secretly calculated upon a union between her niece and Stanley, her disappointment that it was thwarted must have been excessive. Still, she indulged secret hopes that the marriage might yet take place. But these hopes were visionary. Mildred was now in perfect health, and in point of beauty surpassed Rose. But both aunt and niece, though they said nothing to each other, entertained the opinion that Rose was preferred.

Unquestionably, she was very much admired by some of the gentlemen who visited Beaucliffe, and who could not fail to be struck by her beauty and attractive manner. But she gave none of them encouragement, and the notion began to be entertained that she had some previous engagement—just as it was understood that Lady Talmash was

engaged to the Comte de Clairvaux. Stanley, therefore, had no cause for uneasiness.

Mildred, as we have shown, tried to conquer her jealousy, but was not entirely successful. Whenever she became tranquil, some fresh excitement occurred, and she felt quite sure that any resolutions she might form as to self-control would be broken. In short, after a good deal of consideration, she came to the conclusion that an equestrian party would not suit her, and resolved to decline it.

Seeing Stanley on the lawn next morning, she went out to him, and said, "I must really beg you to excuse my accompanying you and a riding party for the present. You're very good to ask me, but I think I'm best out of the way."

"Well, well! just as you please! If you would rather not go, don't. But you mustn't desert me altogether."

"The very first time I can prevail upon myself to appear on horseback again, shall be with you," said Mildred to Stanley. "Have you fixed where you'll go?"

"I had thought of Vale Royal."

"Ah! that will be a charming excursion."

"I'll keep it for you, if you like, and take them to Rostherne Mere."

"No, keep Rostherne for me."

"As you please. There are twenty lovely places to which I can take you, as you know. But it is useless to decide on any of them until you have made up your mind to accompany me."

"I'll give you my decision before long," she rejoined. "But tell me why you are so anxious to have me with you? I should have thought Rose would be a more agreeable companion."

"I want to see you on horseback again," he replied; "and satisfy myself that you really can ride as well as you used to do, for I can scarcely believe it. Remember, it's a very long time since I saw you in the saddle, and you may have lost your nerve."

"I scarcely think so," she replied, confidently.

"Well, I'm glad you entertain that opinion, at all events," he rejoined. "But I shall never feel quite satisfied of your perfect restoration till I see you by my side. Your

father says the same thing. 'When once she has taken a glorious gallop'—those were his words—'such a gallop as she used to take in former days, I shall be content, but not till then.'"

"Well, I've listened to what you have to say," she rejoined. "Now, hear me. My objection to riding, at least, to hunting, is that it encourages feelings of vanity and display, and these I have conquered. Why should I revive them? Why should I expose myself to temptation? I was no better, no happier, when I was constantly on horseback, but I thought more of myself and was gratified by the admiration I excited. My dear father was excessively proud of me, and encouraged me—thus increasing the mischief. All my errors are attributable to this training and to the foolish course I pursued. You saw what I was like when you first beheld me. You know what I became. There is an intoxication in the praises bestowed upon a fearless rider that turns the head, and I constantly suffered from it. Can you wonder that I had resolved never again to run so great a risk?"

"I cannot—I do not," rejoined Stanley. "But you entirely mistake me. I am not like your worthy father. I do not wish you to resume your former practices. Were you to tell me that you meant to enter the hunting-field again, I would dissuade you from doing so. But a quiet ride—such as I propose—can do no harm."

"There is no telling what it may lead to," said Mildred. "I would rather remain on the safe side. I will never hunt again. On that I am resolved."

"I do not ask you to hunt," rejoined Stanley. "I ask you merely to accompany me in my rides on horseback, and you ought not, in my opinion, to have any difficulty in complying with the request."

"I should not mind riding with you alone," said Mildred. "But I object to others."

"What can that matter?" he asked, looking rather displeased. "They wouldn't interfere with you."

"I am not so sure of that," she replied. "If I accede to your request, I must stipulate that we ride out alone."

"That would be rather awkward, and would look as if you objected to some of the others."

"I can't help that. I shan't interfere with them—they mustn't do so with me."

"Well, when will you make a start?"

"In the course of a month—but I cannot fix a day."

"Why not?"

"I still feel nervous. But I won't keep you in suspense longer than I can help."

"Now mind, you have made a promise, and must fulfil it."

"I will," she replied, hastening to the house, and entering by the French window.

A few minutes later, Lady Talmash and Rose made their appearance. They had just come from Brereton.

"What news?" inquired Lady Talmash. "Does Mildred go with us on our excursion?"

"No," he replied. "She will only ride out with me alone."

XXV.

AGAIN ON HORSEBACK.

"How is it that Mildred refuses to ride out with us, I wonder?" said Lady Talmash. "Can she be jealous?"

"I should think not," replied Rose. "But her feelings must have wonderfully changed. At one time, she liked nothing so much as praise for her splendid horsemanship. Now she affects to care nothing about it—but I think she does. Stanley was to take her out alone for a short ride this morning. I'm curious to hear how they got on."

"Oh! they'll get on very well, depend upon it," said Lady Talmash.

This conversation took place in the entrance-hall of Brereton, where the two ladies met, when they came down stairs, and they

now proceeded to the front door, which was left open, and showed them Stanley and Mildred riding up to the house.

"There they are I declare," cried Rose. "Quite alone—no groom with them."

And the two ladies hastened forward to greet them.

Mildred looked remarkably well in her riding-habit—never better. She was likewise very well mounted, though not on her famous hunter. Both ladies told her how delighted they were to see her on horseback again, and their looks left no doubt as to their sincerity.

"Why, you are quite like your former self!" cried Lady Talmash, "only handsomer!"

"Yes, I positively declare I never saw you looking better!" exclaimed Rose. "Stanley must be congratulated on what he has accomplished."

"After such a good beginning, I hope you mean to take a gallop every morning," said Lady Talmash.

"It shan't be my fault if we don't," replied Stanley. "And I think Mildred is pleased."

"Yes, I confess I'm better satisfied than I expected to be," she replied.

"Ere long, I hope you'll take us out with you?" said Rose.

"I can make no promise," replied Mildred, gravely. "I mean to go on very quietly."

"Well, follow up the course you have commenced this morning, at any rate," said Lady Talmash. "Horse exercise, I am sure, will do you good. You have always been accustomed to it."

"I shall go on, I dare say, now that I have started," rejoined Mildred. "But when I first went out, this morning, I was full of uneasiness, lest I should be led into my former errors. But I soon found I was greatly changed."

"You view the matter much too seriously," said Lady Talmash.

"I don't think so," replied Mildred. "Formerly, the healthy exercise of hunting was a minor consideration with me. I thought only of display—of showing off before a crowded field. Now I can resist the temptation. At least, I hope so."

"I have no doubt of it," said Rose.

"But I don't mean to put myself to the test, if I can help it," rejoined Mildred. "Stanley has promised to look carefully after me when I am on horseback, and keep me out of all scrapes."

"Oh! you'll get into none," he rejoined, laughing. "But come. We must be making our way to Beaucliffe. We shall see you after breakfast."

At this moment Mrs. Brereton appeared at the door, followed by Minshull.

"Stop a minute," she cried. "I want to say a word to you."

"You will be suprised to see me on horseback again, after all I have said," exclaimed Mildred, moving towards her.

Mrs. Brereton regarded her with admiration, as did the old butler, who could not repress his delight.

"Why, you look better than you ever did; don't she, ma'am?" he cried.

"She looks exceedingly well, and I'm rejoiced to see her on horseback again," remarked his mistress.

"I'm glad you're pleased," said Mildred to the old lady. "I was rather afraid, but

now all's right." Then leaning forward she added in a whisper, "No more hunting."

"I'm glad of it," said Mrs. Brereton, approvingly.

"Now for Beaucliffe," cried Stanley, making his way to the gate.

Aware that his daughter had ridden out that morning for the first time since her illness, Mr. Warburton was looking out for her return; and when Stanley and Mildred entered the long drive leading to the mansion, they found him there.

The smile that illumined the worthy squire's countenance as he gazed at his daughter, while holding her bridle, was delightful to see. For a moment he could not speak, but he soon recovered, and drawing near her, said, "Now, you have really gladdened my heart. I seem to behold you again as you were when all was bright. Keep as you now are, and I shall desire nothing more."

"But don't ask me to hunt again, dearest papa, for I can't obey you."

"I won't ask you to do anything that may be disagreeable to you," he rejoined. "I

simply wish to express the pleasure I feel in seeing you again on horseback."

"I think we have made a most agreeable commencement," said Stanley. "We shall certainly succeed, if we are not in too great a hurry."

"Don't expect too much of me, dearest papa—that is all I ask," said Mildred.

"You have begun excellently," he rejoined; "and I am glad you have conquered your foolish prejudices."

Amongst those who welcomed Mildred on her return was Georgette. She was standing in front of the mansion with Tom the groom, and quite clapped her hands with delight as Mildred came up. Tom likewise expressed his satisfaction, though in a more decorous manner, as he assisted his young mistress to dismount. Lady Starkey was present, and knowing she should please the squire, was enthusiastic in her praise of Mildred's appearance. The Comte de Clairvaux and Sir Randal also came forward, and showered compliments upon her, but she escaped from them, and hurried upstairs.

"You have made a famous start, I see," said Sir Randal to Stanley.

"Yes, I have done well enough to-day," replied the other. "But I doubt whether I shall be able to go on."

"Don't despair!" cried the comte; "don't despair!"

When Mildred came down to breakfast—after taking off her riding-habit with Georgette's aid—she met with a second warm reception, and prompted, probably, by Stanley and the squire, everybody told her she must "go on."

She smiled at the anxiety displayed, but made no promise; and those who preferred the request thought compliance doubtful.

XXVI.

MILDRED CONSENTS TO RIDE OUT WITH LADY TALMASH AND ROSE.

After breakfast, Mildred hastened to Sister Aline's room, as she wished to offer some explanation of her conduct, feeling certain her friend would be greatly surprised, and perhaps hurt, that she had not been consulted about the propriety of the morning ride, after her own repeated declaration that she would never be seen on horseback again.

She found Sister Aline with a book of devotions before her, and received the customary affectionate greeting. She then sat down beside her.

"I find you have been riding out with your husband this morning," said the sister, somewhat reproachfully. "I am rather

surprised you did not mention your design to me."

"I was afraid you might seek to dissuade me from it," replied Mildred.

"Certainly not, if you had given your husband a promise, as I presume you had. I see no harm whatever in your going out on horseback with him. My fear has been lest you should become as passionately fond of riding as formerly, and I counselled you to leave it off altogether. As you seemed entirely to agree with me, I have said nothing more on the subject of late, considering there was no danger. Nor am I, in the slightest degree, uneasy now, provided you will promise only to accompany your husband."

"I will readily give that promise," replied Mildred. "I have no desire to ride with any one else. But even while acting thus carefully, I feel there is a certain risk, and am bound to mention it to you. If I ride much, I may be led to commit some of my former follies. Certain feelings once ruled in my breast, and might acquire the mastery again. Were I to yield to the wild excite-

ment of the chase, I should inevitably be carried away by it. I must leave all behind me. I must be first."

"I can quite understand the feeling," replied the other; "but it is dangerous, and must be overcome."

"Once fairly roused, it cannot be overcome," rejoined Mildred; "it must be gratified by triumph."

"Then you are right not to expose yourself to temptation. Rather than do so, give up all equestrian exercise."

"O, yes. I cannot tell where I shall stop. I had resolved—I will not say vowed—never to ride again, and I refused even my father, who has been dying to see me in the saddle once more. But I yielded to my husband's entreaties, and went out with him this morning, as you know. Nothing could have gone off better. No *contretemps* of any kind occurred. I enjoyed it in moderation. But should I be able to do so a second time? Should I have myself under equal control?"

"Wherefore not?" asked Sister Aline,

regarding her steadfastly. "What do you really fear?"

"A sudden impulse, which might prompt me to commit some act of folly that I might ever afterwards regret. I had some symptoms that I did not like this morning, and I am certain if a pack of hounds and their followers had passed us, I should have joined them."

"Have you not acquired greater self-control?" asked the sister.

"I think not," replied Mildred. "I did not express my fears to Stanley, and he would have laughed at them had I done so. He does not believe in my weakness."

"I do not wonder at it. It seems quite inconsistent with your present character, and no one would suspect you of yielding to such a feeling, but you are evidently as impressionable as ever. My advice to you is this: decline to ride out again for the present, but do not refuse altogether, or some disagreeable consequence may ensue, which had better be avoided. Your husband may insist upon compliance with his

wishes, and will probably be supported by your father."

"I think this will be the most prudent course," said Mildred. "I will offer no explanation."

The decision was just taken in time, for at the moment the door opened, and Stanley entered the room.

Respectfully saluting Sister Aline, who bowed in return, he said to her:

"Of course, you have heard what a pleasant ride Mildred and I had before breakfast this morning? We must have another to-morrow morning."

"I'm sorry to disappoint you," replied his wife, "but it cannot be."

"Nonsense!" he cried. "You must go. Lady Talmash and Rose will accompany us."

Mildred shook her head.

"I really can't go," she said.

Stanley seemed annoyed by the refusal, and looked from one to the other for an explanation.

"What's the difficulty?" he asked.

"I never meant to ride out every day,"

replied Mildred. "Besides, I told you we must always be alone."

"But you can't possibly object to the two ladies I have mentioned."

"On the contrary, I should prefer them to any other persons—if I cared for society—but, as you know, I wish to be alone. No, they must be good enough to dispense with my company to-morrow."

"May I name any other morning?"

"No, not at present. I may not be in the mood."

Stanley appeared annoyed, and looked sharply at Sister Aline, as if he thought she had been interfering with his plans.

"I alone am responsible," said Mildred.

"Then, pray, do try to make yourself agreeable," he rejoined. "Everybody wishes to ride out with you, and yet you refuse to join them, although there are plenty of horses in the stables, and you have no excuse to offer for declining."

"I throw myself on your good nature to excuse me," said Mildred. "Horse exercise has lost its attraction for me."

"I thought you enjoyed the ride this morning?" he remarked.

"So I did," she rejoined. "I enjoyed it very much. But I broke a resolution in taking it, and that spoiled the pleasure. No, I must have a little time for reflection before I go out again."

"I must talk to the squire, and act on his advice," said Stanley, as he quitted the room.

"You will have both husband and father against you," said Sister Aline.

"Yes, but I won't yield," replied Mildred. "If I once join these riding parties I must go on."

Shortly afterwards the door partly opened, and the squire, popping in his head, asked, "May I come in?"

"Certainly," replied Sister Aline, rising to give him welcome.

"You guess what brings me here, no doubt?" he said to Mildred. "Stanley wished me to use all my influence to induce you to continue your morning rides with him and the two ladies. I sincerely hope you will."

"Dear papa, I am sorry I cannot," she

replied. "I gave Stanley my reasons for declining, and they seemed sufficient."

"To me they seemed the mere result of caprice," replied the squire. "You have changed your mind, that's all. You saw how delighted I was to welcome you on your return this morning. I declare positively that nothing of late has afforded me so much gratification as to see you on horseback again. That ought to have some weight with you."

"It has great weight, dearest papa. I am more anxious to please you and Stanley than any one else. I am really afraid of myself."

"Absurd!" exclaimed her father.

"Mildred has fully explained her feelings to me," said Sister Aline, "and I cannot but approve of the constraint she puts upon herself. She enjoys horse exercise as much as ever, but she dare not indulge in it lest she should be led into temptation."

"Temptation to what?" asked the squire.

"To vanity and folly, as before," replied Mildred. "Under certain circumstances I cannot trust myself."

"Always be on your guard," said Sister Aline. "The Tempter may assail you in some new form, and you may not have strength to resist. Be on your guard, I repeat."

"There is no danger now that I can discern," said the squire, "and if there were, I firmly believe you have strength to resist it. But it is best to be on the safe side, and since you attribute your former follies to the excitement of the chase, do not indulge in it again, lest like results should follow. But I repeat there is no danger, in my opinion."

Mildred's firmness was put to another proof, for the door again opened, and Lady Talmash and Rose came in, and immediately rushed up to her.

"Have we unintentionally offended you in any way?" cried Lady Talmash.

"I always persuaded myself you liked me," added Rose.

"So I do," replied Mildred; "I am excessively fond of you."

"Then prove your regard by riding out with us to-morrow morning. We are come

to ask you in person, and shall be mortified beyond measure if you refuse."

"We'll take the greatest possible care of you," said Lady Talmash. "No harm shall happen. That I engage."

"I'm quite sure of it," said Mildred.

"Then what do you fear?" cried Rose. "You trust yourself to Stanley, who isn't half so careful as we are. I appeal to Mr. Warburton if such is not the fact. Would you not confide your daughter to us, sir?"

"Most certainly, without the slightest misgiving," he replied.

"After such an assurance I cannot hesitate," said Mildred. "I shall be delighted to ride with you to-morrow morning. But my present consent is not to bind me to any other day."

"We hope it will!" cried Rose. "But do just as you please."

The laughter that followed this unlooked for, but satisfactory arrangement, seemed to have summoned Stanley, for he once again entered the room, and, marching up to his wife, took her hand, and said to her:

"You have acted exactly as I could have wished."

"I have really tried to please you," said Mildred.

"And you have perfectly succeeded," he replied.

"May I be allowed to form one of the party?" said the squire.

"Certainly, dearest papa," replied Mildred. "I was just going to ask you."

XXVII.

A DANGEROUS FALL.

BEFORE morning two other persons were added to the party. These were the Comte de Clairvaux and Sir Randal. On hearing of the plan these gentlemen were determined not to be left out, and made an appeal to Mildred, to which she at once acceded.

"I told you how it would be," she said to Stanley. "Unless we kept the thing exclusively to ourselves, we must take everybody."

"Yes, you were quite right," he replied; "but I'm sure we shall have a pleasant party."

"Oh, I'm quite reconciled to the present plan," she rejoined; "only it's not *my* plan."

Next morning she came down rather

before the appointed time, attired for the ride, and attended by Georgette, and waited in the hall till the gentlemen assembled.

Already, Tom, the groom, had been sent over to Brereton with a couple of steeds for the other ladies; and now the rest of the horses were brought round. Presently all the gentlemen made their appearance, looking in very good spirits, and as if the early hour suited them.

The squire was in high good humour, and had something cheery to say to everybody. With his daughter he was extremely well pleased, and took care to let her know it. Moreover, the morning was very fine, and that was a great point.

"Last night I was very much afraid of wet," he said, "in which case our excursion must have been postponed. But we are highly favoured."

"Indeed we are," replied Mildred; "we shall have a charming ride."

In a few minutes all had mounted, and the little troop, headed by Mildred and Stanley, was proceeding along the drive to Brereton.

"Well, I hope you don't regret complying with my request," said Stanley to his wife. "We have really a finer day than yesterday, and I don't think I ever saw the park look more charming."

"I am greatly tempted to take a gallop," she replied; "but I think I had better restrain myself."

"I'll insure you against a fall," he rejoined, laughing. "On with you."

Mildred, however, did not act upon the suggestion, but held back her steed.

"I'm frightened," she said.

"Frightened of what?" he asked, regarding her in astonishment.

"I don't know," she replied. "But I fancy if I let the horse go he will run away with me."

"Ridiculous! dismiss all fear and send him on!" he cried. "I'll keep near you."

"What are you talking about?" said the squire, who was close behind.

"Mildred wants to have a gallop," replied Stanley, "but is afraid of a fall."

"Then don't let her take it," replied the squire. "Much as I should like to see a

good gallop, I shouldn't like to see it finish in that way."

"I'll act on your advice, dearest papa," she rejoined.

But her spirited courser did not seem satisfied with the arrangement, and began to pull very hard at the bridle.

"You'll be obliged to let him go," said Stanley. "Whatever the squire may say, I think a gallop will do you good. Don't be afraid."

"I shan't be able to check this mad horse much longer if he pulls so hard," she exclaimed.

And as the words were uttered the excited animal broke away, and went off at full speed. Finding she had lost all control of him, Mildred looked seriously alarmed.

Stanley kept as near her as he could, and tried to catch hold of the bridle, but his efforts seemed still further to excite the ungovernable steed. All those behind began to be alarmed, and the squire exclaimed, "I'm afraid we shall have an accident."

It was now quite clear that Mildred's steed was no longer under control, nor could

Stanley keep up with his wife. The two grooms, who were following in the rear, would have pressed forward, but the squire felt they would do more harm than good, and kept them back.

Had Mildred possessed her former strength of nerve, there would have been no cause whatever for apprehension, but it was clear she did not, and Stanley soon became as much alarmed as the squire.

The occurrence took place in the drive leading to the mansion, and, fortunately, there was nothing whatever in the way. The only possibility that occurred to Stanley and the squire was that the two ladies might come from Brereton Hall to meet them, and this actually occurred. As Mildred's steed was galloping furiously on, every instant gaining upon Stanley, Lady Talmash and Rose appeared in sight.

They were nearly a mile off, and coming along very slowly, followed by Tom, who soon perceived what was the matter, and told them he feared his young mistress's horse had run away with her.

At first they could scarcely believe it,

but they soon became satisfied that the information was correct.

"I'm afraid you are right, Tom," cried Lady Talmash; "what ought we to do under the circumstances?"

"Shall we go on?" asked Rose.

"No, turn round, and ride slowly back," replied Tom. "Unless the horse is stopped before, I'll see what I can do when it comes up."

Utterly unable to control her steed, Mildred was obliged to let him dash on. He had now become quite infuriated, and it seemed almost certain an accident would occur.

Stanley shouted to Tom, and the latter replied, though not knowing what to do. At this crisis, as may be imagined, the greatest consternation prevailed on all sides, and Tom, driven almost to his wit's end, resolved to make a desperate effort to stop the horse. Accordingly, he waited till the runaway steed and its fair rider drew near, and then made a bold attempt to catch the bridle, but failed.

Daunted by his ill success, neither of the two ladies came to Mildred's aid, but they remarked that she firmly maintained her seat, and hoped, therefore, that she might escape a fall.

About a hundred yards further on there was a gate on the right communicating with the park, which Mildred had often cleared, and she now managed to direct her steed towards it, fancying she should do better on the greensward than in the road.

The horse made the spring, but his foot struck on the topmost rail, and he fell very unpleasantly, throwing his fair rider over his head.

The accident, which was witnessed by everybody, caused a shout of terror from the beholders.

In another instant, Stanley, who was not far behind, came up, and would have leaped the gate at once, but seeing Mildred on the ground, and fearing he might do mischief he got over cautiously, and went to her assistance.

He found her in a state of insensibility,

but could not judge from her appearance whether she was much hurt, or merely suffering from the effect of fright.

Hoping it might only prove the latter, he knelt down by her on the ground, and slightly raising her head supported it on his knee.

Presently she opened her eyes and seemed to recognise him, but the next instant she again became quite insensible.

The accident, as we have stated, was witnessed with general alarm, and several persons hastened to the spot. All of them left their horses at the gate with the grooms.

Like Stanley, her father knelt down beside her, and taking her hand, tried to restore her to consciousness, but without effect. He then directed Tom to ride back as fast as he could to Beaucliffe House and send the carriage, which done medical assistance must be procured.

All these directions were promptly attended to, and such expedition used that almost before it seemed possible the carriage made its appearance, and Mildred, who still remained in a state of insensibility, was

placed in it under the care of Lady Talmash and Rose.

Nor was it long before Tom came back with Mr. Newton, the surgeon, who on seeing Mildred declared she had met with a most dangerous fall, and he feared had sustained some very severe internal injury.

On arriving at Beaucliffe she was still partially insensible, and being taken at once to her room, was attended by Sister Aline and Georgette, both of whom were dreadfully distressed by the accident that had befallen her.

XXVIII.

MILDRED'S LAST INJUNCTION TO ROSE.

Some little time elaped before Mildred opened her eyes, and at first it was evident she did not comprehend what had happened. She had been placed on a couch, and Sister Aline and Georgette were standing on either side, and signed to her to remain quiet.

At length she noticed Mr. Newton, who came forward, and the sight of him seemed to explain matters.

He presented a restorative to her, and Georgette slightly raised her head while she swallowed a portion of it.

The effects of the draught were speedily manifest, and she remarked in a low voice, "I have had a fall from my horse, have I not? I recollect something about it."

"You have," replied Mr. Newton; "and

have been a good deal shaken. Keep as quiet as you can."

"We will take every care of you," said Sister Aline.

"Have you felt any pain in the chest?" asked Mr. Newton.

"Yes, I feel some difficulty in breathing," she replied.

"Then don't exert yourself in the least," he rejoined.

"Am I in any danger?" she asked, looking inquiringly at him. "Don't conceal the truth from me."

"I hope not," replied Mr. Newton. "But it is quite impossible to say at present. You have had a very serious fall."

"I thought so," she replied. "But I must again ask you—is my life in danger?"

"I cannot tell," he replied. "I am not yet certain of the extent of the injuries you have received."

"I will conceal nothing from you, dearest Mildred," said Sister Aline, regarding her with the most affectionate concern. "You are in the greatest danger, and it will be well for you to prepare."

"I trust I am fully prepared, dearest sister," replied Mildred; "and I am quite resigned to the will of Heaven."

Here Georgette turned aside her head, and burst into tears.

"I have one request to make of you, dearest sister, and I am sure you will grant it," said Mildred. "Do not leave me till the last."

"I will not," replied the other, earnestly.

"I have always had a foreboding of late, as you are well aware," pursued Mildred, "that I should die from a fall from my horse, and my apprehensions will now be realised."

"Alas!" ejaculated Sister Aline.

Again Georgette's sobs were audible.

"Restrain yourself," said Mr. Newton to her.

Just then the door opened, and the squire and Stanley came in, and drew near the bed. Mildred seemed pleased to see them.

Mr. Warburton attempted to address his daughter, but his accents were broken, and his eyes blinded by tears. Stanley's feelings were under better control, but he was much moved.

"You are very kind to come to see me," said Mildred.

"How do you feel, my darling child?" asked her father.

"I don't suffer much pain, dearest papa," she rejoined. "But I feel all is over with me."

"Oh! you alarm yourself unnecessarily," he said, and he added in a low voice, "I have telegraphed to Dr. Percival to come to see you at once, and feel sure he will obey the summons. He will be here this afternoon."

"The information does me good," she replied.

Stanley had not yet spoken, but his looks expressed the greatest solicitude. He now took the squire's place, and said to his wife very earnestly, "Don't be alarmed, dearest Mildred. You're not so much hurt as you suppose. Of that I'm certain."

"You mean to cheer me, Stanley, but I can't be deceived," she replied. "I've got my death blow. I shan't live many hours."

"I hope you may live many years," he rejoined.

"No, no, all is over with me," she replied. "But I do not grieve." She then drew him nearer to her, and whispered, "You will soon be free to act as you think proper, and can wed whom you please. But do not hesitate in your choice. Take Rose."

"Is that your real wish?" he asked in the same low tone.

"It is," she rejoined. "I have ever felt I was in your way. But you will now be effectually relieved of me."

"Do not speak thus, I implore you!" he rejoined. "You cut me to the heart. Far better you should live. I will make you as happy as I can."

"Death alone can make me happy, for life has lost its charms. Act as I have told you."

Stanley made no answer.

This conversation was not overheard, since those who were present at the time had withdrawn to another part of the room.

At this moment, Lady Talmash and Rose entered, and Stanley stepped on one side to allow them to approach the sufferer, both of whom were greatly touched by her looks of resignation, and could not repress their tears.

"I have left a message for you with Stanley," said Mildred, taking Rose's hand. "Come nearer and I will tell you what it is."

As no reply was made she repeated the order.

"The injunction shall be obeyed," said Rose.

Shortly afterwards, Lady Starkey and Mrs. Brereton—the latter of whom had been hastily summoned—entered the room, and were much affected by the sight of Mildred.

They wished to remain with her, but Sister Aline besought them not to do so, and the request being seconded by Mr. Newton, they complied, and proceeded to an adjoining room, where they could be immediately summoned, if necessary.

Having administered a few drops of some stimulant, Mr. Newton likewise retired.

At her own express wish, no one was now left with Mildred, except Sister Aline and Georgette. But any of the others could be instantly summoned, if required.

XXIX.

DEATH OF MILDRED.

No sooner was the room cleared than Sister Aline knelt down beside the couch, and prayed fervently for a few minutes, after which she arose, and taking Mildred's hand, asked if she had any confession to make to her.

"None whatever," was the reply. "All my sins have been already disclosed and sincerely repented of, and I trust I shall obtain pardon. I have prayed for an easy ending, but I do not expect it. The anguish I now endure must increase rather than diminish. I therefore trust my parting may be brief."

"What is bodily suffering, dearest sister, compared with that of the soul? Rejoice that your breast is no longer torn by

remorse. May you be absolved from all your sins, and placed by our Redeemer on His right hand in the midst of His elect!"

"Amen!" ejaculated Mildred. "At this supreme hour I feel how much I owe you, dearest sister. Without you I had been inevitably lost."

"If you have yet more to suffer—as it may be—dearest sister," said the other, "bear it with patience and resignation. Trust in Divine mercy, and at the hour of your departure you will be received into mansions of eternal bliss!"

"Amen!" again ejaculated Mildred. "I cannot kneel," she added, in feeble accents, "or I would beg you to lift me from my couch that I might pray. I do not think I shall last long."

Georgette, who had been kneeling in a different part of the room, but was now looking on most anxiously, said, "Shall any one be summoned?"

"Only my father," replied Mildred.

Georgette quitted the room noiselessly, and almost immediately returned with Mr. Warburton.

"I fear your beloved daughter is dying, sir," she said to him, in a low tone, as they came in.

Stepping quickly to the couch, Mr. Warburton took Mildred's hand, and gazed at her pallid countenance.

"I am glad you are come, dearest father," she said. "Give me your blessing!"

"Willingly, my dear child!" he replied, in a voice half suffocated by emotion. "May Heaven bless you!"

"And you forgive me all the pain I have caused you?" she asked, regarding him most anxiously.

"I have long since forgiven you. I only fear I have not been able to make you as happy as I could have wished."

"You have been a great deal too good to me, dearest father," she rejoined, "and I cannot thank you sufficiently. I have not deserved your kindness, but that ought to increase my gratitude, and it does so. Farewell, for ever!"

"Farewell! dearest child!" he exclaimed. "Shall I call in the others?"

"Not till all is over," she rejoined. "You will not have long to wait."

At these words, Sister Aline, who had been kneeling beside the couch, arose, and, approaching the dying penitent, said, "Farewell! dear sister. May you be received in the place of salvation! May the gates of everlasting life be opened to you. And may you be admitted into the glory of the heavenly kingdom, through the grace and merits of our Saviour!"

For a few minutes Mr. Warburton's eyes were blinded. When he regarded his daughter again, an inexpressibly sweet smile still played upon her countenance, but the smile was fast fading away. She was gone!

Sister Aline and Georgette were both on their knees beside the couch.

"O, my dear, dear child!" groaned the old gentleman. "Art thou, indeed, taken from me? For many years thou hast been the chief joy of my life; now, I have lost thee for ever!"

And he struck his breast in despair.

"Console yourself, sir," said Sister Aline, in tones well calculated to soothe him. "She is saved."

"You believe so?" he asked.

"I am perfectly assured of it," was the reply.

"Bring no one in for the present," said the old gentleman, kneeling down beside his lifeless daughter.

After praying fervently for some minutes, he rose, kissed her hand, and proceeded slowly to the door. Before going forth, he turned to look again at her who had been dearest to him on earth, and then, with a groan, departed. Immediately afterwards, the others were admitted, and a most harrowing scene ensued, for all were most powerfully and painfully affected.

The person who seemed to suffer most was Stanley himself. He walked up quickly to the couch on which the body of his wife was lying, and taking her hand pressed it to his lips, but unable to bear the emotions that crowded to his breast, he fell back almost immediately, and rushed out of the room. All the others suffered in more or

less degree, and some seemed much hurt that they had not been summoned earlier; but it was explained to them that the dying lady's injunctions were strictly acted upon. She had only desired to have her father and Sister Aline with her at the last. But all were struck by the extraordinary beauty of the spectacle presented to them. A smile still played on those death-pale features—a smile such as is rarely beheld — and all agreed that she looked lovelier than in life.

XXX.

DR. PERCIVAL ARRIVES AT BEAUCLIFFE.

Dr. Percival obeyed Mr. Warburton's summons, and arrived at Beaucliffe late in the afternoon.

Mr. Newton, who was still at the house, saw him in the first instance, and described the accident that had occurred to Mildred, explaining that her recovery was impossible. The doctor next saw poor Mr. Warburton, whom he found in the deepest distress, and after doing his best to console him, went with him to the chamber of death. Both Sister Aline and Georgette were in the room at the time, but they immediately retired.

The same impression was produced upon Dr. Percival as on all others. He had never beheld aught so beautiful, and stood gazing like one entranced. A few flowers

were placed upon the pillow on which the lovely head rested, and the arms were crossed upon the breast, as in a recumbent statue; but the features were entirely unchanged, and retained their angelic expression, the hue of the skin being white as marble.

The agonised father gazed at her for a moment, but unable to bear the sight, turned away and wept.

While contemplating the placid features of the departed, Dr. Percival could not help reflecting on her sad fate. Brilliant as had been her opening career, it was extremely brief, and her married life was destroyed—then came an illness that brought her almost to death's door—and when he himself had restored her to health and beauty, how soon afterwards was she taken away! These reflections filled him with pity.

"She had everything that can constitute worldly happiness," he thought; "a most indulgent father, who lived only for her; a large fortune; a husband, to whom she was supposed to be attached, and who must have been devoted to her; extraordinary

beauty and fascination; wondrous skill in horsemanship; and a hundred other accomplishments. Yet all went for nothing. Love of admiration spoiled all. Fortunately, she saw through her errors, and became a sincere penitent. Alas! how much happier might have been her life had it been properly regulated!"

"What are you thinking of, doctor?" asked Mr. Warburton, who had seated himself near the couch.

"Of your daughter's transcendant beauty, sir," replied the doctor.

"What good has her beauty done her?" groaned the old gentleman. "It has not brought her long life, or happiness—that is certain. Of late she has had a strong presentiment that she should be killed by a fall from her horse. In consequence, she left off riding. Yet this morning she yielded to persuasion, rode forth, and there she lies?"

"To whose persuasion did she yield, sir?" asked the doctor. "Not to yours, I am sure."

"To her husband's," replied Mr. Warburton. "He laughed at her fears, and insisted on her going out with him."

"He will never forgive himself now for doing so," exclaimed Stanley, who had entered the room unperceived, and stood behind them. "But who could suppose that the acknowledged first horsewoman in Cheshire would die in this manner? I did not believe she was in the slightest danger, or I would not have let her go forth. I thought she had allowed some superstitious fears to get the better of her judgment, and that these fears ought to be overcome, and Lady Talmash and Rose Hylton were of the same opinion. That was the cause of my insisting, and I now bitterly regret it."

"It was Fate," cried Mr. Warburton.

"It looks like it, I confess," said Dr. Percival.

Then observing that Mr. Warburton had sunk into a chair, seemingly overwhelmed with grief, he said to Stanley:

"We must get him away, or he will be completely prostrated."

But just as they had raised him, Sister Aline returned with her attendant, and said: "Pray let Mr. Warburton stay a few minutes longer."

"I dare not," replied the doctor. "He must be removed from this painful scene, or I cannot answer for the consequences. To-morrow, I hope, he may be able to come again."

So saying, he and Stanley took each an arm, and bore the poor old gentleman to the door, where he stopped for a moment to look back at his beloved daughter before going forth.

"Alas! alas! this is a great trial to him," said Sister Aline. "He suffers more than any of the family."

"No doubt of it," replied Georgette.

Shortly afterwards Lady Starkey came in, accompanied by Lady Talmash and Rose. They brought with them a few more choice flowers, which they placed upon the bed.

"We are come to beg you to say a prayer for the departed, while we kneel beside her," said Lady Starkey.

Sister Aline expressed her willingness to do as they requested, and they all knelt round the bed, while she read forth the following prayer:

"Grant, O Lord! that while we lament

the departure of this thy servant, we may always remember that we are most certainly to follow her. And give us grace to prepare for the last hour by a good life, that we may not be surprised by a sudden and unprovided death, but be ever watching, that when Thou shalt call we may with the Bridegroom enter into eternal glory, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen!"

There was something in Sister Aline's tender accents that gave a most soothing effect to this prayer, and not one of the listeners but was deeply moved by it. They almost expected that some ceremonial would be performed at this time, but nothing of the sort was attempted.

When those who knelt round the couch arose, each took Sister Aline's hand and kissed it, and Lady Starkey said to her, "It will always be a most satisfactory reflection that you have been able to accomplish the good work you had resolved to do."

"Yes, my task is nearly done," said the sister. "I shall see her placed in the tomb, and shall then retire for ever to the Retreat."

XXXI.

THE FUNERAL.

Mr. Warburton sent a message by Stanley to the Comte de Clairvaux and Sir Randal de Blundeville, who were still in the house, entreating them not to depart, as their society would be the greatest possible comfort to him as soon as he was able to come down stairs, and after consulting Lady Starkey, they agreed to remain.

The poor squire was now entirely in the hands of Dr. Percival, and esteemed himself most fortunate in having such good advice.

"If you had not been with me at this terrible time, doctor, I feel I should have sunk," he said; "aud I hope you will remain with me till after the funeral."

"I should be very sorry to leave you just

now, Mr. Warburton," said the doctor ; "and at any personal sacrifice I will stay with you for a few days. However, I hope and trust by that time I shall be able to set you right. But you must not dwell on this sad event more than you can help. I know you will say your feelings are not under your own control, and that you cannot always answer for yourself. But my orders must be strictly obeyed. You must not go again to your daughter's room."

"Oh, dear doctor," supplicated the poor squire, "do not debar me from that sad satisfaction."

"Well, you may go to-morrow, but I confess I shall feel extremely uneasy about you."

"I hope you will accompany me, doctor."

"From my recent experience I fear I shall not be of much use," replied the doctor. "However, we shall see how you are to-morrow."

Just then the door opened, and two clergymen were ushered into the room. These were the Rev. Mr. Hatton, Vicar of Beaucliffe, and the Rector of Thorne. Both

were elderly men, and pleasant companions, of whose society the squire was ordinarily very fond. He immediately rose from his seat to greet them, but it was with a very sorrowful countenance. After presenting Dr. Percival to his visitors, whom both seemed pleased to meet, Mr. Warburton begged them to be seated, and resumed his easy-chair, while the doctor sat down beside him.

"It is very kind of you to come to me, my good friends," said the old gentleman. "I have had a very severe blow from which I shall long suffer, if I ever entirely recover from it."

"We would fain offer you all the consolation in our power," said Mr. Hatton. "I know not when I have been more grieved and shocked than by the sudden death of your beloved daughter, just when she had been so wonderfully restored to health by the skill of Dr. Percival.

"You are very good to speak of me in such terms," said the doctor.

"They are richly deserved, sir," said the Rector of Thorne. Then turning to the

squire, he added, "This sad accident has been a cause of real affliction to your numerous friends, Mr. Warburton. They were well aware that your chief hopes of happiness were centred in your daughter, and will quite understand the anguish you must have endured." Here he received a look of caution from Dr. Percival. "However, we sincerely hope you will not take her loss much to heart."

"That is my advice to Mr. Warburton," said the doctor. "He has been a most affectionate father, as we all know, but he must not sacrifice himself. He must not give way too much to grief, or we shall lose him as well as his daughter."

"And we cannot spare him," cried Mr. Hatton.

"No, I don't know any man, who would be a greater loss to the whole county than Mr. Warburton," said the rector. "He is universally beloved and respected, and we hope and pray that he will live for us, if not for himself."

"I am sincerely obliged to you, gentlemen, for your good wishes," replied the

squire, brightening up a little, "and if anything can restore me, it is such kind expressions as you use. But I must needs say a word in regard to the funeral. I have left the arrangement of that melancholy business entirely to my son-in-law, Mr. Stanley Brereton."

"We are quite aware of it, sir," replied Mr. Hatton, "and we understand it will take place at the end of the week."

"On Saturday," said Mr. Warburton. "It is my wish that it should be strictly private. But I hope you will officiate, sir, in conjunction with Mr. Hatton," he added, to the rector.

"I have already expressed my anxious desire to do so," replied the other.

At Dr. Percival's express request, the interview was not prolonged, and the two reverend gentlemen went down stairs to the ladies, with whom they remained for some time in conversation. They were then interrupted by a message from Stanley, who begged them to come to him in the library. They obeyed, and found him with Mr. Lacy, an undertaker of Chester, and after a little

conversation they proceeded to the church —Mr. Warburton's wishes being then fully explained, all preparatory arrangements were made.

From the church Stanley and Rose repaired to the chamber of death. Sister Aline and her attendant were still watching and praying by the body, which was covered with freshly-gathered flowers, and looked as saintly and beautiful as ever. The two divines were greatly struck by the sight, and deeply affected. Mr. Lacy did not advance till they had retired, but though accustomed to such scenes, he was greatly moved. Stanley, who stood at a little distance, had great difficulty in maintaining his firmness. Before leaving the room, both clergymen spoke a few kindly words to Sister Aline. Stanley likewise informed her that she would not see Mr. Warburton that day.

"I did not expect to see him," she replied. "I hope he is somewhat better."

"Not much, I fear," replied Stanley. "Dr. Percival is constantly with him. I shall not feel easy till the funeral is over."

Mr. Lacy remained for a short time after the others, and then took leave most respectfully of Sister Aline. At their request the Comte de Clairvaux and Sir Randal were permitted to see the unfortunate lady, and were taken to the room in which she was lying by Lady Starkey. They were accompanied by Lady Talmash and Rose. Like all who had preceded them, they were greatly struck by the spectacle, and almost overpowered. Till they beheld her in death neither of them had supposed Mildred was so beautiful. They now regarded her with astonishment and admiration. Lady Starkey said nothing to them, but allowed them to form their own opinion. The comte remarked, "I have never beheld such a beautiful sight before." And Sir Randal was of the same opinion.

By Dr. Percival's advice, Mr. Warburton did not come down stairs, but received his friends in his own room. He saw his beloved daughter's remains once more, and then she was placed in the coffin, which was half filled with flowers. But he was obliged to

be removed by force, and uttered a loud cry when dragged away.

It was a most heart-rending scene, and it was extremely fortunate that Dr. Percival was present at the time. But for him Lady Starkey felt certain that the poor squire would have died. The interest respecting Mildred at this juncture was extraordinary. All that had formerly been felt respecting her seemed revived. The house was beset by callers, who were received by Lady Starkey and Stanley, for the poor squire was unequal to the effort, and in some instances deputed Dr. Percival to see the visitors. No doubt, the few days left of the week passed in a most melancholy manner. Still those staying in the house did not depart, but seemed determined to remain over the funeral.

At length, the sad day arrived.

The inner coffin had been closed the day before. Sister Aline had said her last prayers over the body of her departed friend, and had exerted all her strength to maintain her firmness, but with very imper-

fect success. It had been Mr. Warburton's especial request that his daughter's funeral should be strictly private. But the wish could not be fulfilled. On the contrary, the little church was crowded. Not only the whole of the large household was in mourning, but the whole of the numerous tenantry and their families; while all the worthy squire's friends desired to be present, and could not be refused. Of course, the chief mourners were Stanley and Mr. Warburton, but Sister Aline was likewise conspicuous.

Stanley bore his grief firmly, but Mr. Warburton never raised his head, and on him every eye was fixed. Dr. Percival was with him, and watched him carefully. The coffin, covered with a black velvet pall edged with silver, was placed near the altar, and not far from the entrance of the vault, which was open.

The service was admirably performed by the two divines, and in the sermon preached by Mr. Hatton, he spoke with great feeling of the afflicted father. At this juncture, there was not a dry eye in the church, but

Mr. Warburton's face was buried in his handkerchief. At length the sad ceremonial was ended, but not for some time after was the church cleared, for very many persons wished to view the coffin more closely. When it was borne to the vault, Mr. Warburton arose, and, taking Dr. Percival's arm, followed it. But he could not remain, and after seeing it placed, returned to the mansion.

Among the few who entered the vault was Sister Aline, but she did not go there until the church was quite cleared. She was attended by Georgette. Stanley was there at the time, but he bowed and quitted the sombre spot as she entered. It was lighted up by a few tapers, but these were sufficient. Her object was prayer, and to bid farewell for ever to her friend. For the present the coffin was still left upon the bier, which was standing in the middle of the vault. Georgette threw down a cloak on the floor, and on this Sister Aline knelt. During the interval, Georgette remained at the door of the vault, and after the lapse of some quarter of an hour she came to warn her mis-

tress that some persons were approaching. Sister Aline immediately arose, uttered a few valedictory words, let fall her veil, and passed out of the vault.

Those who entered at the same moment were Lady Talmash and Rose, but they did not attempt to stop her. All her preparations had been made for immediate departure, and nothing now remained to do except to bid farewell to Lady Starkey. Sister Aline had begged that this final interview might be private, and the request was granted. What passed between them matters not, except that her ladyship behaved with the utmost kindness, and was much affected.

"We shall probably never meet again in this world," said Sister Aline, "but I shall ever remember you in my prayers. I cannot sufficiently thank you for your extraordinary kindness to me—kindness that has left an ineffaceable impression on my heart. Farewell! May Heaven bless you!"

On quitting Lady Starkey, Sister Aline entered a carriage that was waiting for her, and, attended by Georgette, drove to Ches-

ter, whence she proceeded by rail to Newhaven, and without delay embarked for Dieppe. On arriving there she immediately entered the Retreat, telling the Lady Superior and the sisters, who warmly welcomed her, that she would never leave them more. Georgette was amply rewarded for her faithful attendance. Before parting with her, her mistress bestowed upon her a very handsome sum of money, which subsequently formed her marriage portion.

Not long did Sister Aline survive Mildred. Her strength suddenly forsook her, and she died in less than a month after her return to the Retreat.

XXXII.

AN EVENT THAT MAY HAVE BEEN EXPECTED.

A HAPPIER period, we rejoice to say, has, at length, arrived. Our worthy squire has recovered from the dangerous illness caused by the loss of his beloved daughter, and is now in as good health as he can ever expect to be. Lady Talmash has become Comtesse de Clairvaux. The marriage took place in Paris, and Lady Starkey and Rose, with Stanley and Sir Randal de Blundeville, were present on the occasion.

The union promises extremely well, for the pair are exactly suited to each other. The comte has the greatest admiration for his wife, whom he thinks one of the most charming persons he ever met; while, owing to his distinguished manners and perfect good breeding, he suits her infinitely better

than a younger man unaccustomed to the best society, like poor Charles Kynaston, would have done. They remained for some time in Paris, at the Hôtel Continental, and entered into all the amusements of the gay city.

Stanley's union with Rose may now be regarded as settled, and will, in fact, take place, with the full approval of Mrs. Brereton, Mr. Warburton, and Lady Starkey, in six months after Mildred's decease. We shall, therefore, hasten on, and come at once to the period when the preparations for the marriage are completed.

The Comte and Comtesse de Clairvaux, who have been invited, have just arrived from Paris, and Sir Randal is expected. At Beaucliffe all traces of gloom have disappeared, and, owing to Lady Starkey's judicious treatment, the worthy squire has completely regained his former cheery look.

The important day finds all prepared. Stanley, who is staying at Brereton Hall, comes over betimes, bringing with him his mother and a couple of friends, Sir Richard Hyde and Captain Leigh, who are intended

to serve as his best men. The four bridesmaids, all of whom are uncommonly pretty, are staying at the house, and are now just finishing their toilettes. The bride has already come down stairs, and looks quite charming. The sun shines brilliantly, and everything appears most propitious.

At eleven o'clock the wedding party enters the church, already filled with well-dressed company. The bride is leaning on the arm of Mr. Warburton, and attended by her four lovely bridesmaids, each bearing a large bouquet. She walks along the crowded aisle towards the altar, while the wedding hymn is sung by the choir, the organ being played by Mrs. Hatton.

When she arrives at the chancel, the bridegroom, who is standing there with his two friends, comes forward to meet her, and the service is immediately commenced by Mr. Hatton, who is assisted by the Rector of Thorne. Mr. Warburton gives the bride away, while Lady Starkey stands beside him. The pair are then joined together, and both feel it to be the happiest moment of their lives. Hand-in-hand, they then

move to the altar, while the psalm is sung, and all formalities are completed.

None of the numerous company depart, but stay to offer warm congratulations as the bride and bridegroom proceed to their carriage, the path outside being strewn with flowers. The wedding breakfast is sumptuous, and all the guests (among whom is our old acquaintance, Sir John Lambert) are very lively. As far as can be discerned, no painful recollections haunt our worthy squire. He predicts a very happy future for the newly-wedded pair, and we rejoice to say that his good wishes have hitherto been fulfilled.

The honeymoon was spent in North Wales —spent most delightfully—and when the happy pair returned they yielded to the squire's entreaties, and instead of taking up their abode at Brereton Hall, which was quite ready for them, came to Beaucliffe.

It would seem as if Stanley were doomed to be defeated on this point. Mr. Warburton *will* have him at Beaucliffe; while Lady Starkey is so fond of her niece, who suits

her exactly, that she is unwilling to part with her. So there they are still, and likely to remain.

But after all, nothing can be better than Beaucliffe. It is the pleasantest house we know, and the best conducted. Generally, it is full of company, but whenever you go there, you are certain of a warm welcome, and if there shouldn't be room, you can move on to Brereton. Stanley and his charming wife are cited—and we believe with truth — as the happiest couple in Cheshire; and it is said of her, that although passionately fond of her handsome husband, she is never jealous of him. But perhaps he gives her no cause.

THE END.

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